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Felix Wilfred

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Indian Church: Leadership of Tomorrow

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Editorial

Great leaders embody the noblest longings and highest ideals of humanity, no matter how big or small the constituency where they are at work. The year 2013 witnessed the advent of a great religious leader in the person of Pope Francis, auguring a new spring for the Church and hope for our world. The year saw also the departure of a colossal statesman and leader, Nelson Mandela. These towering heights of leadership often stand in contrast to our daily abysmal experiences both in the world and in the Church.

Aware of the importance of leadership for the life of the Church and its mission in India, Asian Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies (ACCS) organized jointly with the Board of Theological Education of the Serampore College (BTESSC) an Ecumenical Consultation on “Indian Church-Leadership of Tomorrow”, during 18 & 19 November, 2013 in Chennai. The present number of *Jeevadhara* carries the keynote address delivered by Cardinal Telesphore Toppo and the papers presented at the workshop with the final statement of the Consultation.

Cardinal Toppo recalls the figure of Moses and his leadership in liberating the Israelites and triggers our reflections on the modern forms of slavery and the type of leadership required today to face the present-day challenges, and to be able to serve the people in the light of the Kingdom of God. After naming some of the present-day slaveries, the Cardinal observes, “the challenge of the leadership of the Indian Church is to take off the sandal, stand on the holy ground and listen to the voice heard in the burning bush. Is it a call to go to Pharaoh from whom we are running away? Introspection is very important at this juncture before we search for insights to prepare the mould for tomorrow’s leadership”. He invokes the example of Jesus and places Church-leadership in the context of mission. Alluding to Jesus taking a few loaves of bread and

some fish from the people for multiplication, he notes how important it is for the leadership to nurture the talents and resources people already possess.

The contribution of Cruz Hieronymus throws light on leadership in the early Church and reflects on the type of leadership required for today and tomorrow. Aruna Ganandason and X.D. Selvaraj explore respectively from Protestant and Catholic perspectives the issue of leadership. S. Lourduswamy on his part shows the discrimination Dalit people suffer in Church-leadership. My contribution reflects on Church-leadership in the light of Pope Francis. The Final Statement of the Consultation has turned out to be an important document for critical reflection on leadership in the various Churches. The issue concludes with an appeal for the creation of a Dalit cardinal which is as good for the global Church as it is for the Dalit people who form the majority of Christians in this country and yet deprived of key leadership positions in the Church.

The discussion on leadership necessitated a critical stock-taking of the conditions of today. However, the word "*Tomorrow*" in the theme of this number is meant to instill hope that things can be changed, and one need not despair. The issue is inspired by deep love for the Church and trust in the Spirit who will continue to renew and reform the life of the Christian communities and especially its leadership and raise them up to fulfill the mission of the Kingdom of God in response to the many and critical challenges the country is facing.

I wish to thank Dr Mohan Larbeer, secretary of BTESSC, for his cooperation in organizing the Ecumenical Consultation, and all the contributors for their active participation and for re-working their papers for publication in *Jeevadhara*. With a lot of dedication, my secretaries, Ms Josephine and Ms Nirmal, worked hard to organize the Consultation as well as assisted me with remarkable attention and patience in finalizing the manuscript for publication in *Jeevadhara*. I thank both of them very warmly and appreciate their wholehearted commitment.

Felix Wilfred

Asian Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies
Chennai

Pastoral Reflections on Indian Church-Leadership of Tomorrow

Telephore P. Cardinal Toppo

Introduction

Leadership is very vital in any sector of life, be it in the family, or village, or community, or the larger society, or an organization, or an institution, or a nation, or the world, or the Church. Every unit needs animating and life-giving leadership. Hence, the theme of the Ecumenical Consultation, 'Indian Church-Leadership of Tomorrow' is very relevant and apt. We need to have very deep reflections and involved discussions to arrive at some conclusions on the styles of leadership though the essence of leadership remains the same as found in the Scriptures. Indeed, as enshrined in the vision and objectives of Asian Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies, Chennai, dialogue, understanding and mutual learning have to be given paramount importance while engaging in the reflective process. Based on the present scenario, we need to foresee the mission context of tomorrow before we propose the kind of leadership the Church should embody for tomorrow. Of course, we are not expected to finalize the blueprint for tomorrow's Church leadership in India, but certainly the Consultation can find sufficient insights if engaged in genuine dialogue and deliberations. I wish to base my key note address on the Scriptures spelling out the essentials before we think of the style of leadership for the Indian Church of tomorrow.

Remove Your Shoes, You Are on Holy Ground

God surprised Moses, the prototype of Jesus, as he was on his run from the wrath of Pharaoh. The setting of the scene, as all of us know, was mount Horeb where Moses to his great astonishment was led to

see a flame blazing from the middle of a bush without the bush being consumed by fire. Moses was further astonished when he was asked by a voice coming from the bush to take off his sandals as he was standing on holy ground. Then, God revealed Himself to Moses as 'I AM' the God of his ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Issac and the God of Jacob(Ex. 3:1-6). Moses was perplexed and could not comprehend the vision. Yahweh did not spend any time to give an explanation to the perplexed Moses but directly shared with him, as it were, the anguish of his heart. He said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt; I have heard them crying for help on account of their taskmasters. Yes, I am well aware of the sufferings. And I have come down to rescue them...' (Ex. 3:7-8). God now missioned Moses to go to Pharaoh from whose wrath he was hiding himself and running away. He is asked to go back to the dangerous zone as deemed by him. The mission is the liberation of His people from slavery and leading them to the Promised Land. Moses is given the assurance of the ever abiding and never failing presence of the 'I AM'.

The world of today may appear liberated from such slaveries through the efforts of great leaders down the centuries and the awakening that have taken place because of the unbelievable scientific discoveries; high profile education; enlightenment of minds and souls through cross cultural reflections, religious insights etc. We are proud to be in this period of human history. Globalization has brought us closer and has made the world very small. We are more connected to each other than ever before in the history of humankind. Nevertheless, we are also faced with more challenges today than ever before. We are trapped in the advancement of the world and in all its inherent evils. Our hearts shiver even to think of the many heart breaking incidents that occur all over the world everyday and especially in our country, be it against women, the vulnerable, the poor and the marginalized. The unaccountable atrocities carried out in the name of religion, caste, region, language etc send shivers into our narrows. Terrorism and arson have made the world blood-thirsty.

Modern slavery includes debt bondage, forced marriage, exploitation of children, human trafficking, dowry deaths, and honour killing etc.

The Hindustan Times reports that according to Global Slavery Index 2013, almost 14 million people are trapped in different forms of slavery in India and 3 million sex workers exist in India. As per UNDP, 72.14% of the 29.8 million people in modern slavery are in Asia. There are innumerable lives scarred by that experience. 'Young girls sold off as maids, boys picked up to work as domestic helps, families forced into manual labour: this is the picture of modern slavery in India' (*The Hindustan Times*, Nov 10, (2013): 11). In the land of great sages and of splendid spirituality with a Constitution that upholds the values of fraternity, equality and liberty, the plight of the vulnerable is heart-rending. They are treated as objects for use and throw. The horror stories of so many children, young girls and women reveal how cruel have we become in our behavior towards the poor. The divisive policies, the systematically nurtured fundamentalism, terrorist mind-frame, greed etc. are creating huge cracks in our democracy. The soul of India seems to be adopting a 'silenced conscience' gripped with fear. Is the leadership in the Indian Church under the spell of the same fear? Or, is it making a compromise for survival being a tiny minority? Well, our contributions in nation building have been phenomenal in any field of development. However, the challenge of the leadership of the Indian Church is to take off the sandal, stand on the holy ground and listen to the voice heard in the burning bush. Is it a call to go to Pharaoh from whom we are running away? Introspection is very important at this juncture before we search for insights to prepare the mould for tomorrow's leadership.

'Blessed' Are You

Light was seen on the mountain again. It could be termed as another burning bush experience as Jesus pronounced the beatitudes and preached probably the world's greatest sermon (Mt. 5:1-11). Mahatma Gandhi in his autobiography, *'My Experiments with Truth'* holds this sermon as one of the greatest ever written. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, gives us the mould for leadership through eternity, for the days gone, the days in and the days to come. Nothing can surpass the inscribed wisdom in the 'blessed': the poor in spirit, the gentle, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers etc.

Leadership of today and tomorrow has to align its words and attitudes to match with its deeds. Pretensions and false shows have to be put off in order to be clothed and adorned with beatitudes. The leadership of tomorrow has to shine forth from the light emanating from the values of the Gospel, especially, the beatitudes. I do not see any other choice. Certainly, this light shining forth, in all its lived wisdom can engage in cross cultural; inter-religious; interdenominational dialogue to widen the horizons of life. The meeting of hearts in such an engaged dialogue will add new dimensions to tomorrow's leadership. The voice will be once again heard from the mountain top, 'blessed are you'.

I have Set You an Example

Jesus has set many life examples to emulate and one among them certainly is the washing of the feet of His disciples (Jn. 13:1-15). It was not a just ritual before he would depart from them but an intended act carried out in absolute humility to inspire the disciples to wash one another's feet, or to be at the service of the other. Selflessness and humility are the marks of servant leadership or inspirational leadership proposed by Jesus. It is other-centered, holding the other above self and always thinking for the better of the other. It involves respect and reverence for the other; his/her opinion; contribution and involvement. Nobody is looked down upon or downgraded but everyone finds his/her space within servant or inspirational leadership. No lording over the other but holding the other in brotherly and sisterly love. Indeed equality, fraternity and participation are very much valued.

The example set by the Master is to be followed until the end of time. It cannot be reversed or pushed aside as a matter of the past. Inspirational leadership possesses the character to win hearts; to reconcile enemies; to build relationships at level grounds and to unfold the epiphany of God's love. The Indian Church leadership needs to be inspired by this act of the Lord and Master who set an example of absolute humility in service. Leadership is a call to serve and not to lord over the other. Mother Teresa may not be acknowledged as a world leader but in her humble service to the poor she won hearts across and the whole world

stood in salutation on her death. Inspirational leadership is the call of the hour and would be the joy of tomorrow. The simple and humble servant of God His Holiness Pope Francis, without any political clout or armed power, has been ranked the fourth influential leader in the world today by Forbes, the prestigious US business magazine. A new global communication report calls Pope Francis the most influential world leader on Twitter, who has the second-largest following among world leaders on the fast-paced social media network. He is turning out to be an inspirational source for the world today and he is setting the trend for leadership in the Church for today and tomorrow. The World Bank president Jim Yong Kim said after his meeting with Pope Francis, "As an advocate, Pope Francis I think is unparalleled," he said. "His participation and his leadership in the Global movement to end poverty would really solidify that movement."

Bring What Is Available.

'Here is a small boy with five barely loaves and two fish, but what is that among so many?' (Jn. 6:9). Jesus blessed what was available and the disciples with a blushed face went around distributing the same to the five thousand and more men. The act of Jesus was beyond their comprehension. They rightly thought that only the prophet who is to come can accomplish this feat. They had a reason to think so as they were expecting the messiah and they were right in their thinking too. However, they seemed not to have dwelt on the fact as to why the prophet needed the five loaves and the two fishes to feed the people. Didn't he have other possibilities? God has unlimited possibilities and therefore it is good to reflect as to why Jesus chose to perform his miracle with the available resources.

God has endowed everyone with gifts and potentials though nobody can claim to have all the possibilities in him/her. God gives to the Church the gifts of his Spirit (Rom. 12:3-8; 1Cor. 12:7-11; Eph. 4:11-13). These "gift passages" make it clear that God gives spiritual gifts to all the members of the body, not just for a selected few. The leadership of today and tomorrow need to have the openness to identify, nurture the talents and gifts of others and create sufficient opportunities

for them to put those gifts into optimum use for the benefit of humanity and the Indian Church. Based on the concept of solidarity, leadership at different levels should be respected, encouraging the emergence of collective or corporate or congregational leadership participatory and democratic in nature much beyond pastor or clergy centered leadership. Miracles are possible only when available human resources are pooled together for the benefit of the masses. Leadership among the laity based on the Gospel values has to be encouraged and in their sharing of the available resources many more miracles would be made possible. Thus, understanding the balance between individual gifts and the giftedness of the body is very vital for the Church leadership tomorrow in order to accomplish a confluence of views and actions.

Cross cultural vitality

Cultural sensitivity in leadership will be one of the vital components or demands of tomorrow's leadership in the Church. The Church in its ministry is dealing with different ethnic, languages and regional communities rich in their own cultural nuances and the inherent values. Providing space for dialogue among the cultures and promoting unity in diversity will be an acid test for tomorrow's leaders. Every cultural group will like to find their respectable space within the Church wanting to continue from the perspective of their worldview. The inspirational leadership while viewing from the perspective of the Gospel all the nuances brought into the larger community from different cultures, will enhance the Church with the collective wisdom and avoid any kind of polarization. This world needs research, continuous dialogue and reflection as being carried out by the Asian Centre for Cross Cultural Studies. Humanly speaking, each of us born in an ethnic group would like to hold its culture as my culture and probably the best among all. Tomorrow's leadership while being aware of this natural feelings has to have great sensitivity, deep knowledge and the skill to bring all the 'best' together in an act of brotherhood and sisterhood. Indeed, the cross-cultural contribution will add vitality to leadership and make it more inspirational.

Leadership in Mission and for Mission

The mission of the Church belongs to the Father inaugurated by the Son and carried forward by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church. Thus the Church is in mission sharing with humanity the immense and compassionate love of God. This is its single minded purpose and the only reason for its existence. Leadership in the Indian Church has to represent this mission in the context of tomorrow. Therefore, what would matter most is not just the qualities or traits of the leaders but the energy with which he/she will build relationship among communities manifesting the ONE love of God, ever compassionate, merciful, forgiving and reconciling. In the changing context of the nation, the pro-active and positive response of the leader welling from Christian conviction and commitment, personal integrity and transparency motivated by the values of the Kingdom of God would matter much. The leader will enjoy acceptance and his/her presence would bear lasting fruits provided he/she is Spirit-filled and Christ-centered. His/her motive has to be the mission held above his/her personality and individuality.

Communication and Action

The world of today has made great revolution in the field of creative communication. People communicate in the most innovative and find ways to sell their ideas. Nobody has much time to listen to stories and pious talks. The leaders have to be men and women of creative faith, communicators motivating themselves and inspiring others to engage in little acts of goodness. The involved, autocratic, pious and archaic talks will not sell the Gospel of love. Obedience has to be inspired by life of integrity and not commanded by authority alone. People listen to souls enlightened through a committed life in the service of humanity. If not, leadership will become a sign of contradictions and thus counterproductive. Leaders will get isolated from the people impacting in more conflicts and more divisions among Christians. Communication and action carried out with illuminating faith will set the path ablaze.

Conclusion

Jesus certainly stands out as 'the leader' to be emulated at every given period of history. He pitched his tent among the people and became 'grace upon grace' for them. He came so that they would have life in its fullness. The good shepherd knows his sheep . He will leave the ninety nine and go in search of the lost. The grain of wheat has to fall and die to render a rich harvest. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Light. His heart is a heart of compassion and mercy. He leads from the front and gives up His life for the liberation of all. Being rooted in Jesus, the Indian Church leadership of tomorrow has to work out through dialogue and mutual understanding a life-giving, risk-taking, inspiring and all embracing leadership style to lead the Church. Collective, or corporate, or congregational leadership must emerge from the grassroot believers. The Church in India guided by such a leadership will be a leaven in the nation to lead the teeming millions to Jesus, who said, "I have come so that they may have life, life in all its fullness." (Jn. 10:10).

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Lessons from the Early Church for Church-leadership of Tomorrow

Cruz M. Hieronymus

1. 'Church' in view of early Christian Communities

'Church' is the assembly of the people of God. The Greek word for Church is 'eklesia'. Eklesia is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word 'kahal Yahweh'. Kahal Yahweh is the Hebrew expression for the people of God. Thus the Church is basically the people of God or assembly of the people of God.

According to St. Paul, Church is an 'ideal society' which has done away with social, religious and sexual discriminations. It is a continuation and perfection of the society formed through the covenant at Sinai. In that covenant-society the enslaved Hebrew people were liberated, made into a nation, endowed with new covenantal relationship and given a new way of life. As the oppressed and enslaved Amorites, Canaanites, Jebusites, Hittites, Egyptians and others were freed and made into one, new egalitarian society of the people of God,¹ so also through the work of the Holy spirit "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2: 9-11) shedding their social, religious, economic and cultural differences, became one, new, egalitarian society, which is the Church of God.

¹ Cf. N.K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, London: (1979): 119 ff; D.M. Howell, *An Introduction to the Historical Books*, Chicago: 1993; A.R. Ceresko, *The Old Testament: A Liberative Perspective*, Bangalore: (1993): 1234.

In this Church, according to St. Paul, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3: 28, cf. Col 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 10:12). Such is the egalitarian society that is anticipated in the Jubilee celebration (Lev 25) and Jesus’ Nazareth manifesto (Lk 4:18-21).²

The Holy Spirit, who made the varied and scattered people into one people of God, continues to animate and guide it. The spirit made the dispersed disciples of Jesus into “a new people who began to understand God’s plan realized in Jesus. He made them live in love and fellowship. Koinonia became their hallmark. The spirit continues to animate and enliven the Church by showering on it several spiritual gifts ((1 Cor 12:7-10; cf. Rom 12:6-8).

2. Leaders in the early Church

There were several kinds of leaders in the early Church. In the Christian community at Corinth there were ‘apostles, prophets, teachers, doers of mighty works, healers, helpers, speakers in tongues etc. (cf. 1Cor 12:28). The Letter to the Romans speaks of ‘teachers, exhorters, generous givers, doers of ‘merciful deeds’ etc. (cf. Rom 12:6-8). According to the Letter to the Ephesians, there were apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers....for building up the body of Christ (4: 11-12). In the Pastoral Letters we come across elders, supervisors, men and women deacons, members of the order of widows etc.

2.1. *Leaders from the Bible*

2.1.1. Prophets

The Bible speaks of several great prophets such as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, Micah etc. They proclaimed the will of God; they announced righteousness and denounced wickedness. The prophets of the early Church too, in the tradition of the Old Testament, proclaimed God’s salvific deeds (Acts 20:23; 21:4); witnessed to Jesus and explained his message. They

² Cf. R.W. Wall, ‘Acts of the Apostles’ in *NIB X*, Nashville, (2002): 72f.

were regarded as very important. According to the Letter to the Ephesians, “the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (2:20). Prophets were inspired and their message was the result of revelation. They interpreted the Sacred Scriptures. They instructed, edified, exhorted, comforted and rebuked. There were women prophets too (Acts 21:9).³ Through speaking in tongues and ecstasy, they gave their teaching. These prophets of the early Church did not seem to have travelled to many far off places; they were more teachers in their own Churches.

2.2. *Leaders from Jesus’ Life*

2.2.1. Apostles

Apostles had their origin from Jesus himself. Jesus, “went up to the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he named also apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message...” (Mk 3:13-14). Apostles lived with Jesus and had witnessed his resurrection. They had received the command from Jesus to proclaim the gospel to all nations. They proclaimed the gospel and established several Churches. The Apostles were the principal ministers in the early Churches. Apart from the twelve, there were also Apostles as Paul, Barnabas and others. Like the apostles, teachers, miracle workers, healers, doers of merciful deeds also should have originated from Jesus’ time. Such ministers were active in the Corinthian Church already in the 50s.

2.2.2. Teachers

St. Paul speaks of the teachers after the apostles and the prophets. Several teachers seem to have worked in various Churches (1 Cor. 12:18; Rom. 12:7; Gal. 6:6). Teachers don’t seem to be radically different from prophets,⁴ though they are not inspired. Teachers taught the word of God; read the Sacred Scriptures and explained it to them; spoke of the Jesus traditions and imparted moral instructions. They seem to have remained and worked in particular Churches.

³ Cf. C.E.B. Cranefield, *Romans*, Grand Rapids, (1985): 304.

⁴ Cf. K. Kaesemann, *Commentary on the Romans*, Grand Rapids, (1980): 340.

2.2.3. Doers of mighty deeds

Doers of mighty deeds (miracle – workers) are mentioned after the teachers. Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the Kingdom through the parables and miracles. Miracles were in fact proclamation of the Kingdom of God in deed. Empowering the weak, lifting up the downtrodden, bringing the marginalized to the centre, filling the hungry, providing the needy with what they need etc are all effective proclamations of the gospel even today!

2.2.4. Healers

Healing was all important in Jesus' ministry. It was an essential element of his gospel proclamation. It was not just healing of physical illnesses; emphasis was given to healing from psychological and social evils. Therefore naturally healing was very important in the ministry of the early Church too.

2.2.5. Other Leaders

Apart from the apostles, prophets, teachers, doers of mighty deeds and healers, there were also helpers, those who presided and those who spoke in tongues. Helpers must have been serviceable in several ways to the early Christian community. "They helped neglected widows and orphans, with the proletariat of the world harbor and a constant flow of new comers, not to speak of the poor and sick."⁵ These must have gradually developed into deacons. *Those who presided* should have been those who planned and executed the activities of the community. They could have been the leaders of the congregations' charitable works.⁶ They could have been, quite often also, the owners of the houses where the community gathered for worship. They could have eventually become the overseers (bishops) of the later days. Those who spoke in tongues are mentioned as the last among the leaders in 1Cor 12:28. Though some, especially in Corinth, regarded speaking in tongues as the most important gift of the Spirit, according to Paul it is the last in the list and it has to be regulated and explained. Gifts, according to him are important, not because they are spectacular, but because they contribute to the building up of the Christian Community.

⁵ Cf. E. Kaesemann, *op.cit.*342.

⁶ Cf. L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids, (1988): 442.

2.3. *Leaders from other socio-religious backgrounds*

Some of the leaders in the early Church arose from other socio-religious backgrounds. ‘Elders’ arose from the Jewish background; but ‘supervisors’ or *episcopoi* (bishops) originated from the Greek background. In the course of time, both elders and supervisors indicated the same leadership role. Thus Acts. 14:23 speaks of the appointment of elders. But, Phil 1:1 speaks of only supervisors. In Acts 20:28, Paul speaking to the elders of the Church of Ephesus, tells them that God has appointed them supervisors (Acts. 20:28). The qualities required of both of these leadership roles are much the same (1 Tim. 3:2-7; Tit. 1:6-9).⁷ Yet, eventually one among the elders seems to have been selected as coordinator or ‘overseer’ (bishop).⁸

Elders seem to indicate more who they were and supervisors indicate more what they did in the communities. As elders, they should have conducted worship and solved problems among the members of the communities. As supervisors they supervised everything, were responsible for everything in the community, and they had to report to the one who appointed them.

These elder-supervisors had to teach (2 Tim. 4:2) and preserve and protect the sound teaching (Tit. 1:9). They were the custodians of the deposit of faith (1 Tim. 6:20f). They were responsible also to correct those who did wrong. The common worship too was their responsibility. They were expected to read the Sacred Scriptures during worship and exhort the people (1 Tim. 4:13). They were responsible for the communities and were expected to give good example to them.

2.4. *Leaders who emerged according to the needs of the times*

2.4.1 Deacons

The deacons seem to have emerged from the needs of the early Christian communities. Chapter 6 of the Acts of the Apostle speaks of such a need. The Church leadership at that time was fully Jewish. The apostles, who were the leaders, were all from the Jewish background.

⁷ Cf. G.T. Montague, *First and Second Timothy, Titus*, Grand Rapids. (2008): 73.

⁸ Cf. L. J. Johnson, *Letters to Paul's Delegates*, Valley Forge, (1996): 142f

But, by that time, a good number of Christians were from the Hellenistic background. There was hardly any leader who could fully understand the problems, feelings and aspirations of the Christians from the Hellenistic background.

This problem attracted the attention of the leaders during the distribution of food, narrated in Acts 6. "During those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews, because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food" (Acts. 6:1). Most of those who took part in the daily distribution of food were widows of the Hellenists.

There could be several reasons for this. First of all, several Christian Hellenists had come from other parts of the world to spend their last days in Jerusalem and to die and be buried there. The widows of such people were quite many in number and they were dependent on the support of the Christian Community.⁹ Besides, it is mainly the Hellenists who were persecuted. It is they who were affected most after Stephen's murder. It is their widows who needed the support of the Christian community most.¹⁰

Moreover Hebrews in whose hands were the distribution of food, began to overlook the Hellenist widows because of the Hellenists' radical approach and outright condemnation of the Jewish institutions.¹¹ Hellenists from the beginning followed Jesus more closely in his radicality. They, following Stephen rejected the temple and the Jewish laws. They also rejected circumcision. They came forward enthusiastically to follow Jesus' life of sharing. Therefore inspired by the example of Barnabas (Acts. 4:32-37) himself a Hellenist, they gave whatever they possessed to the poor. Thus having nothing for themselves, they were dependent on the common distribution of food. The Hebrews did not seem to appreciate the great generosity and sacrifice of the Hellenists. On the contrary they were discriminated.

Thus the fact that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food hurt the sentiments of the Gentile Christians. If there were leaders

⁹ Cf. E. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, Oxford, (1971): 261.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, London, (1983): 13.

¹¹ Cf. E. Haenchen, *op.cit.* 268.

from among them, who had personal experience of having given up everything for those in need, they would have understood, appreciated and held in esteem these Hellenist widows and done with love whatever is possible to help them during the daily distribution of food. They began to realize the need of leaders from among themselves. That is to say, they began to feel that there should be leaders from the Gentile Christian communities too!

The Jewish Christian leaders, i.e. apostles did not find fault with the feelings of the Gentile Christian people. They understand the feelings of the new i.e. Gentile Christians; they saw the reasonability of their expectation. They realized the fact that they, though appointed by the Holy Spirit, were not sufficiently sensitive to the needs of the Gentile Christians. They realized the urgent need for leaders from among the Gentile Christians and began to work at setting up a new leadership for them.

Along with the existing leadership of the apostles, there emerges a new leadership from the Gentile Christian Community. Since 7 is an important number for the Gentiles as 12 for the Jews, 7 Gentile Christians - Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicholas - are chosen to be leaders in the Church. Their names indicate that they were all Gentile Christians.¹²

These seven were leaders as the Apostles were. They too, especially Stephen (Act.7) and Philip (Act. 21:8), preached the gospel. Definitely the Apostles too served for the needs of the people; otherwise they could not be disciples of Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served (Mk. 10:45). In fact, according to Jesus service is itself a leadership activity.¹³ Therefore the statements of Luke in Acts "it is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables" (Act. 6:2) and, "We for our part will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word" (Act. 6:4) are to be understood properly. For Luke the title apostle is reserved only to the twelve, who followed Jesus during his ministry. He does not give this title even to his master Paul! Obviously he is not prepared to give it to the new Gentile leaders. Though their work was

¹² Cf. F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, Hants: Galilee / Doubleday (1983): 208.

¹³ Cf. Felix Wilfred, *From the Dusty Soil*, Chennai, (1995): 213f.

much the same, the title apostle, having been reserved only to the twelve, he gave another title, namely 'deacons' to the Gentile Christian leaders. In fact, since 'service' is the most important mark of the disciples of Jesus, this title deacon meaning 'servant', is indeed most appropriate to the new leaders in the Church!

Thus both the apostles and the deacons were leaders in the Church.¹⁴ All the same, even in the New Testament, in the course of time the deacons seem to have become helpers of the elder – bishops (cf. 1 Tim. 3:18-23). Apart from doing service, they were also expected to hold fast to the 'mystery of faith' (1 Tim. 3:9). Qualities expected of the deacons were same as those of the bishops (overseers) (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

2.4.2 Women deacons

Women deacons too must have been leaders who emerged from the needs of the times. There seems to have been women-deacons in the Church by the time of the Pastorals Letters. "Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things" (1 Tim. 3:11). Here 'women' are not to be understood as 'wives' of deacons; rather they are women-deacons. The Greek expression used here, i.e. 'hōsautōs', indicates another unit of the previous category. From 1 Tim 3:8 the sacred author speaks of deacons. After describing the qualities required of men deacons, he speaks of some specific qualities required of women, who discharge this sacred duty. Moreover had the sacred author meant to speak of the wives of the deacons, he would have naturally said, 'their wives', rather than 'hōsautōs' (likewise).

There is no specific mention of the ministries performed by the women-deacons. One can assume that they performed the same ministries which the men-deacons were doing.

2.4.3 The order of widows

There seems to have been a service structure linked to the widows at the time the Pastoral Letters were written (1 Tim. 5:3-16). One should have completed 60 years of age to be enrolled in the widows' order or group (v.9). She must have been married only once (wife of one husband) (v.9). She must be well attested for her good works (v. 10). She should

¹⁴ Cf. M. Hengel, *op.cit.*, 130; E. Haenchen *op.cit.*, 264f.

pray night and day (v.5). The believing community would take care of the widows (v.16). Thus the widows' group or order seems to have been a well accepted, approved and legitimate body. There were qualities required of widows, who wished to be enrolled in the group. They had also specific duties and obligations to carry out. The early Church believed that only aged and experienced widows could perform them properly.

3. Aspects of early Church leadership which can be lessons for the leadership of the Church of tomorrow

3.1. Flexibility in leadership structures

There was a remarkable flexibility in the leadership structures of the early Church. There were some structures in the early Church too. But they were in a less developed stage. They took a very long time to become organized and fully developed.

Over the ages, some of those structures in the early Church disappeared. Ministries found in the Churches of Corinth and Rome, such as miracle-working, healing, exhorting etc. disappeared. Some of them were performed by other ministers. Some other ministries emerged anew. Leadership structures, such as elders and overseers were borrowed from other communities and they were adapted to the needs of the growing Church. Needs of the Church made new structures such as deacons, deaconesses and order of widows emerge.

The exact nature, shape and structure of the leadership roles in the Church were not detailed, fixed or defined by God, nor was it done by Jesus.¹⁵ Leadership structures required for the realization of Gods Kingdom on earth were taken from the Bible or from Jesus' life or from other communities and adapted to the situations of the early Church. As seen above, with the passage of time some of them disappeared. Some others developed into new structures. Still some others were absorbed by other ministries. By the time of the Pastoral Letters, most of the ministries of the earliest Church were absorbed by the elder- bishop and diaconate structures and performed by them.

The leadership structures of today such as bishops, priests and deacons are the continuation, growth and development of the leadership roles of

¹⁵ Cf. Joe Currie, *Shepherds after my own Heart*, Bangalore: (1991): 42ff

the early Church such as apostles, prophets, teachers, elders, overseers etc. Today's leadership structures in the Church are therefore structures which developed through the centuries, according to the needs of the times to realize the ideals of God's Kingdom. Though this development has taken place according to God's will and the guidance of the Spirit, not all structures can be said to correspond fully to the Kingdom perspective.

Over the years, one could observe rigidity in the Church authority structures. They seem to have lost their original flexibility. Slowly the Church authority structures became so important that people began to regard the Church authority structures themselves as the Church. Happily in the Catholic Church the Vatican II opposed this trend and focused on the people of God as the Church. It also unequivocally declared that the Church leaders and the people have equal dignity and responsibility in the Church (Lumen Gentium, 13).

Therefore it is high time that elements and aspects (such as monarchical) in the Church leadership, which don't correspond to the gospel values, should be eliminated. Keeping in mind the flexibility inherent in the Church structures, such are conducive to realize the gospel values today should be accepted, adapted and introduced without hesitation. Ministries performed in the early Church, such as empowering (performing mighty deeds), healing and encouraging (exhorting) should get a major focus in today's ministry.

3.2. The Christian Faithful and Church leadership

In the early Church all the leadership roles were assumed by the Christian Faithful. There was no distinction between clergy and laity. The 'clergy' as specific group did not exist in the very early days. There is no talk of the priests in the New Testament, except in the Letter to the Hebrews (8:10). Jesus condemned the activities of the priestly class which were not in accordance with God's will. It is indeed strange that the priestly class, which has no strong base in the New Testament has assumed in some way, the monopoly of power in the Church!

¹⁶ Cf. E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ*, New York: (1981): 38-41.

In the early centuries, the leaders (such as the elders, overseers) functioned as priests. In later days, the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) said that priesthood should be conferred on those who have been accepted as leaders by the Christian community. Those who relinquished their leadership, seems to have relinquished their priestly status too!¹⁶ In those days people did not begin to serve after becoming priests; rather those who were already serving were proposed by the community to become priests. In the course of time priesthood was regarded as a position of power rather than service. The gap between the people and priests became larger.

All the Faithful have equal dignity and responsibility in the Church in virtue of their baptism. On this basis, they should be involved in all leadership roles and participatory structures. As seen above, we should promote the kind of structures and leadership patterns that would help the realization of the ideals of the Kingdom of God, proclaimed by Jesus. Since Jesus himself had not fixed or determined any particular leadership structure, the people of God have the responsibility to choose structures which can serve the needs of the times better and leadership patterns, which can more effectively inculcate the values of the gospel in the hearts of the people of our times.

In the early Church the role of the laity was very important in choosing its leaders. As we have seen above, only those who had served the believing community and proposed by them could become bishops, leaders/priests/pastors. Today the selection and appointment of leaders in several Churches are done in a secretive manner. The believing community has practically no role in the selection of its leaders. The leaders, such as bishops, priests, pastors etc of tomorrow should, in same way, be elected by the people of God. Though one may have the fear of some possible malpractices, election is still the better way than any other. It will show that we trust and respect the people. It also shows that we accept that the believers are mature enough to make the right choice. The laity should be allowed to take part in all types of meetings and conferences, such as the Ecumenical councils, the Synods, Episcopal conferences etc.

3.3. *Women and leadership*

Women have been regarded as inferior to men in most cultures. Most religions too have denied them their due roles. Coming from the Jewish milieu, Christianity also is not very different from other religions in this regard. Most often women have been regarded as second class citizens in the Church. Women who are more active in cultic and social activities are denied their due role in Church leadership. This is probably not so much due to theological reasons, as much as historical, sociological and psychological ones. Could God who created men and women as equals, give a secondary role to women, just because they are women, in the building up of His Kingdom on earth?

Women seem to have assumed much more leadership in the early Church than today. Junia was an Apostle (Rom. 16:7). Phoebe was a deaconess in the Church of Cenchreae (Rom. 16:1). Daughters of Philip are said to be women prophets (Acts. 21:9). Euodia and Synache were leaders in the Church of Philippi (Phil. 4:2f). Prisca, Maria, Tryphaena and Tryphosa were exercising leadership roles in the Church of Ephesus (Rom. 16:3, 6, 12).

St. Paul too had so many women collaborators. In Rom 16 there are as many women collaborators for Paul as men. Some of these women had risked their necks for his life, i.e. for the proclamation of the gospel (Rom. 16:3-4); others had worked hard in the Lord (Rom. 16:12); still others had struggled with him in the work of the gospel (Phil. 4:3). This action of Jesus and Paul associating many women in their ministry itself was a revolutionary gesture. For them the Kingdom work was equally open to women as it was to men.

It is unfortunate that women today in some Churches, are not doing even what their counterparts were doing two millennia ago! While some Churches are quite ahead in giving to women several leadership roles (such as pastors, Bishops etc) others are very reluctant to allow them even to do the minimum. It is imperative that all the Churches allow women to exercise every leadership role, including that of the bishop and make use of their special talents, characteristics and nature to the growth of the kingdom of God.

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Models of Protestant Leadership.... Agents of Transformation

Aruna Gnanadason

The pioneering initiatives of lay leadership

Lay people in the Protestant Churches in India have been responsible for pioneering and leading work at different moments of history. The role of Protestant missions in the fields of education and health is well documented, as are the efforts to bring in social upliftment to communities cowed down by patriarchal and caste based discrimination.¹ Even the government of India acknowledges the role the missionary movement played in encouraging the education of women for example.² The missionaries were “the most important non-official agency”³ to engage in this work in those days. “They became the initiators mainly because in the early 19th century the officials of the (British) East India Company were reluctant to take up this issue for they feared that it would create unnecessary hostility amongst the people and would amount to interference in their social and religious activity.”⁴

Unfortunately the Indian intelligentsia too did not want to get involved initially. “The Christian missionaries not only entered the scene but took

1 James Elisha Taneti, *Caste, Gender, and Christianity in Colonial India: Telugu Women in Mission*, US: Palgrave Macmillan, December 18, 2013.

2 *The Indian Social Reformer*, A newspaper, May 7, No. IX, (1988): 282. Cited by Gouri Srivastava, *Women's Higher Education in the 19th Century*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, (2000) : 54

3 *ibid.*, Gouri Srivatsava, 38.

4 *Ibid.*, 38

up the 'dangerous' and sensitive issue."⁵ While building institutions and paving the way for women's higher education they did it "with a mixture of evangelical and humanitarian zeal".⁶ While conversion was a key part of the early missionary efforts, the fact remains that they saw education as a way to make women literate and empower them to resist social and cultural practices that denigrate them such as sati, enforced widowhood, early childhood marriage; as well as to lift them out of caste oppression.⁷ The missionaries saw the promotion of female education as a way to develop the personality of women.⁸

At the outset the focus was on literacy and school level education and a commitment to mould women as good wives and mothers. The concern for Christian higher education for women was initiated by an American Methodist educationist and missionary Isabella Thoburn, who took a different attitude to the education of Indian women. By 1890s, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, with which Thoburn was associated, was pushing its girls' boarding schools to a collegiate level in India, China and Korea. For Thoburn and the Women's Foreign Missionary Society, the education of women for leadership was a missiological goal in itself; she did not see it only as a way to evangelise Indian women.⁹ For lay women missionaries themselves this was the only way they could get involved in mission work. It is also recorded that the work of the missionaries was the foundation on which the independent Indian state fashioned its own work on education and healthcare.

There were also several Indian social reformers and evangelists who in those early stages offered their leadership in the communities. The blurb announcing the soon to be released book entitled "Caste, Gender, and Christianity in Colonial India" reads as follows:

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38

⁷ See also Joy Gnanadason, *A Forgotten History: The Story of the Missionary Movement and the Liberation of people in South Travancore*, Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1994.

⁸ Gouri Srivatsava, *op cit.*, 38-39.

⁹ Mary Louise Slater, *Future Maker in India: The Story of Sarah Chakko*, New York: Friendship Press, (1958): 40

Beginning in the nineteenth century, native women preachers served and led nascent Protestant Churches in much of Southern India. Even while allying with their missionary employers, they evolved their own mission theology and practices. This volume identifies what Telugu Bible women believed their mission to be and how they practiced it. It also examines the impact of Telugu culture and socio-political dynamics, such as caste, gender, and empire, on the theology and practices of the Telugu Bible women.¹⁰

The point I am making here is that this period of history saw the leadership of many lay women and men who were active in Protestant Churches.

There are many more examples one can give of the continuing role of lay people in the Protestant Church taking leadership in important areas of ministry. I give just one example for the present to affirm that even small leadership initiatives by the Church can usher in change. Rev. Daniel Premkumar director of diaconal concerns in the Church of South India Synod, because of his pastoral experience in villages in Andhra, started a project to focus on the sacredness of farming and agriculture. "We have forgotten that the people who grow our food play a critical role in the care of creation," he says. "That is why we are creating a farmers' Bible," thus advancing the concept of agri-ministry or of agriculture as a ministry of the Church, and upholds the need for the Church to take a leadership role in addressing the concerns of farmers. The Agricultural Workers Fellowship (AWF) was formed in 2011, and organised an AWF workshop where theologians and farmers came together to discuss agricultural perspectives on biblical passages and this led to the idea of a book offering a reading of the Bible from the farmers' perspective. They hope this book and a farm workers' devotional guide will contribute to the effort to spur the Church to explicitly integrate faith and agriculture. It comes at a time when food and farming in India - and globally - is at a critical juncture.

In a time of GMO's, the industrial promotion of monoculture farming and other unsustainable farming practices and concurrent farmer suicides,

¹⁰ James Elisha Taneti, *Caste, Gender, and Christianity in Colonial India: Telugu Women in Mission*, *op cit*.

a Church group emphasizing safe food and healthy soil and water, comes as a breath of fresh air. The Church of South India's new "farmers' Bible" offers an opportunity for the Church to be more actively engaged in food, farming, and the well-being of farmers and for the farming community taking agency and leading the process for this life-giving ministry.

"It hasn't been easy," Premkumar says. "For decades, the Church has gone along with society and ignored farming. Now we want to bring dignity to farmers, to agricultural workers, and to the land itself. We are promoting organic farming and there needs to be a lot more training on organic farming and crops that are good for drought ridden areas, such as traditional varieties of millets. The Church is often unaware of the importance of these issues in the lives of the people." Reclaiming the sacredness of farming helps restore right relationships between humans, the earth, and God. Doing so challenges multiple dimensions of unsustainability, from the corporatization of farming to distorted visions of a "good life". For the farmers involved in this initiative, one thing has already changed: They know their work is sacred. They start their work with prayer, blessing their seeds, and in their own way charting a path to reclaim the sacredness of cultivating the holy land in which they grow our food.¹¹ This example I share to show that leadership is being the salt and leaven in the world - taking on pioneering work - in those areas where it is needed the most. One can see visible glimpses of this in the history of the Protestant Churches in India.

Leadership in the Church leaves much to be desired

At the ecclesial leadership level too there is much to celebrate in the life of the protestant Churches in India. The efforts of the Churches to engage in efforts for unity of the Churches; even organic unity as in the case of the Church of South India; but other creative and challenging ministries they have been involved in such as standing in solidarity with Dalit Christians; caring for creation through expressing support to peoples' struggles to protect the earth; interfaith efforts are some of the issues that have been addressed (even if not completely!). These are small

¹¹ From a report by Sara J. Walcott <http://sojo.net/magazine/2013/12/sower-went-out-sow>, accessed 17 November, 2013.

signs of hope that the Church in India can take on new and path breaking ways.

However, it is also necessary to look realistically and honestly at what is happening at the ecclesial, administrative and pastoral levels of the Churches and to reflect on the central principles of vital and effective Church leadership. This correlates of course with a similar concern about leadership in the national political, economic and organisational structures of Indian society at large. The longing is always for the Church to lead the way, to be able to stand on moral high ground over and above secular institutions. But then, what we see and witness in the leadership of the Indian protestant Churches is not comforting. Regretfully, the abuse of power and increasing levels of corruption has set into many facets of Church life – the abuse covers not just financial dealings but the power that comes with institutional and ecclesial power. Caste, class and patriarchy intermesh to pose hard questions on leadership practices in many Protestant Churches.

A draft document being prepared for the National Council of Churches in India announcing a National Ecumenical Campaign for Transparency, Accountability and Responsibility, states,

There exists a popular belief that it is God who appoints people to positions of authority, and therefore in general leaders enjoy immunity. There is a misplaced deference to the ordained in the name of spirituality and sacerdotalism and the authority of ordination to priesthood, as given to them by God which has been accepted without careful study. In fact quite a few individuals seek and remain in power through illegitimate and unscrupulous means. This situation has blunted the consciousness of the “priesthood of all believers” in the Church. Therefore many congregations remain today as passive participants in the life, administration and work of the Church; they are even morally and ethically a frozen people.¹²

The critique here is not just of a few in leadership positions and the ways in which they are able to protect themselves when they abuse their

¹² Draft of the National Council of Churches in India to initiate a National Ecumenical Campaign for Transparency, *Accountability and Responsibility*, not yet approved.

power, but of all of us as congregations who by our silence are tacitly allowing this to happen in our churches.

What are the Qualities of Leadership We Need?

What we need today is an alternative style of leadership – one which would reject hierarchy and competition and would affirm a model of partnership and true democracy in decision making, in Church polity, in developing its theology and spirituality, so as to ensure mutuality and accountability. We need sound systems of governance because all human institutions, including the Church need to be cared for and nurtured. However such systems cannot be based on domination and control as they presently are fashioned. In a world that so desperately needs an active and compassionate Church orders of ministries will need to be fashioned in such a way as to contribute to the healing of our societies and the earth itself. Leadership that is empowering and liberative needs to be supported by lay and ordained ministries that have to be carefully crafted, trained and endowed with the necessary authority and power to serve the Church, the society and the people and give of their best.

If I may add here, as a lay feminist theologian, I have appreciated the call of some women to ordained ministry. I believe firmly that women as priests can make a difference. It is true that for some Churches the problem is theological – but other Churches are re-examining the heart of their faith and have found theological and spiritual resources and insights, which have led them to ordain women as priests and now even a few bishops. (I digress a bit to acknowledge that a few months ago a woman bishop Rt. Rev. Pushpalalitha Eggoni was consecrated Bishop of the Dornakal diocese of the CSI, symbolic as this may be – as it was 65 years after the birth of the Church that this event happened.) However, I would state clearly, right away, that it is important for all ordained men and women to contribute to redefining, refining and reconstructing what priesthood is all about. We need to constantly challenge the danger of understanding the role of the clergy “as an authoritarian sacerdotal caste with only formal ties to a community.”¹³ Priesthood needs to be accountable to the community it serves by emulating a Christ-like life.

¹³ Brand Eugene L, *Vocation and Ministry, In Search of a Round Table, Gender Theology*

Archbishop Michael Ramsey reminds us that the Church cannot be understood apart from the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen: "Thus the first need of Christians, in face of the apathy and the bewilderment about the Church, is to know and to be able to say plainly what the Church really is." Ramsey's own articulation of that ecclesial identity is that the Church is the one and only human organization that is able to give expression to Christ's death and resurrection. The Church is, then, the bearer of God's saving work to the world (the why of Church leadership). So if we transfer Ramsey's point to what of religious leadership, the key question is to ask what patterns of thought, speech, and action on the part of the Church's leaders - both lay and ordained - most effectively contribute to the fulfilment of this gospel mandate. In these terms, the Church's thinking on the question of leadership is too often divorced from a clear articulation of the content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected.¹⁴

If this be the basis for Christian leadership, then, the priorities that will impel us to service need to be carefully worked out as relevant to each time and context, strict standards of personal conduct need to be required, but also monitored and enforced, and spiritually focused patterns of individual and corporate existence will remain applicable in the Church in all its activities. The Church's leadership cannot be exclusively defined and limited by the particularities of a single personality, the idiosyncrasies of a particular community or culture, and even the current identity of a Christian denomination; it has to draw its leadership in Christ as its primary identity marker and from there live with the Gospel of service to all; inclusive of all but not forgetting the Gospel imperative of God's option for the poor – especially Dalits, Adivasis/Tribals, women – all who are the least, the outcast and the broken in the society.

and Church Leadership, Kanyoro Musimbi R.A., ed. Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication. (1997): 15

¹⁴ Beely and Britton, *op cit*.

Conclusion: Reinventing the Church!

Is this possible that we could reinvent the Church so as to make it more authentic to its gospel calling? Leonardo Boff speaks of *ecclesio-genesis* – in his words, “first comes the flock, and then, the hierarchy, for the sake of the flock, the shepherd.”¹⁵ Letty Russell continues to explain that to Boff hierarchy was important for the Church, but he underlined that its purpose is to serve the faith community, the lay people of God. She also quotes Hans Kung in this context who had written that, “Ecclesiology is an error when it turns out to be “hierarchology”.¹⁶ We need today leadership that shares power and authority, power that is shared not accumulated, especially at the top levels. We need leaders who inspire others to lead, especially those who are in the margins of the Church and society – then we can have a reinvented Church – the household of God, in Jesus Christ.

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¹⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Bases Communities Reinvent the Church*, Robert R. Barr, Trans. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, (1986): 24 quoted by Letty M. Russell in *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church*, Westminster, Louisville: John Knox Press,(1993): 68

¹⁶ *ibid.*, Hans Kung in Letty Russell

Contextual and Prophetic Church-Leadership - A Catholic Perspective

X.D. Selvaraj

There is no meaningful text without a particular socio-historical context. The context of today is the all pervading and penetrating impact of globalization which has spread its octopus hands into every area of socio, economic, political and cultural life in our world. The market and media in the globalized world are at the service of corporate companies and industries. The new idol called Money (Mammon) which has the power to buy anything and anyone seems to be actually leading our world today. As a result of all these, the poor who have no purchasing power in the market, are excluded and are treated as non-beings who can easily be dispensed with and disposed off.

Coming to our country, India is already facing the social evil of caste discrimination and the social problem of grinding poverty and rampant corruption; gender injustice has relegated most of the women to peripheries.

Response of the Catholic Leadership

The leadership of the Church in India is seen in efficient organizing of liturgy, administration of sacraments etc. After the Second Vatican Council, local languages, native signs and symbols were introduced into the liturgy. Indigenous songs and bhajans are composed and sung by people. There is some degree of people's participation by way of prayer of the faithful in the Eucharistic celebration, and spontaneous prayers, sharing and singing in para-liturgical services.

The leadership pays special attention to the field of education. In fact the Catholic educational institutions enjoy an enviable reputation for

discipline and academic excellence. They are among the most sought after institutions by people. Christians have been pioneers in the education of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in our country. Women's education in particular has been one of its major contributions to nation building.¹

In a similar way the catholic leadership in India is engaged in health care, social service and development work serving especially the weaker sections of the society, irrespective of caste, creed and sex. It has kept by and large a national and secular outlook in its social and other service organization.²

But this leadership with all its highly developed liturgy, pioneering education and praiseworthy social service has become rather inadequate to address and effectively respond to the emerging problems and the rapidly changing complex realities of today. Hence there arises the *felt need for a new type of leadership* in the Catholic Church in India today.

Jesus, Our Model for Leadership

As in everything else, Jesus is our model for the new type of leadership. At the summit of his immersion into the socio-political-economic and cultural life of his time, Jesus had the peak experience of God in his baptism which took place in solidarity with the despised sinners and outcastes in Jordan river. The Spirit came upon him and Jesus heard the voice of the Father (Mk. 1:11). This meant that Jesus had an intense experience of being unconditionally loved and accepted as Son by His Father. This foundational experience of Jesus gave birth to a vision to bring about God's reign of love, justice, peace, fellowship etc. as his mission. In the realization of this vision of a new social order, there emerges the unique leadership of Jesus.

Leadership with a Vision

What is a vision and how is it born? A vision is born by the deep experience of being dissatisfied with all the injustices, evils and corrupt behaviours of an existing society. The individuals who experience such

¹ C.P. Varkey, *Authority its Use and Abuse*, Mumbai: St. Paul's, (1999): 337.

² John Desrochers, *The Social Teaching of the Church in India*, Bangalore: NBCLC/CSA, (2006): 128.

dissatisfaction come together. They refuse to accept such degenerated state of affairs. They defy inhuman practices and protest against the pervading socio, economic, political and cultural situations (cf. Mt. 5: 10-12). "This is not only the point of irruption of the repressed longings of the masses but also a point of irruption of the Divine"³

Their dream of creating an alternative society with its new norms of love, justice, peace truth, participation etc. which does not exist today, is what is called a vision.⁴ The difference between a vision and a pure dream is that the former is situated in the real socio, political, economic and cultural life context while the latter is not.⁵

Nobel laureate, Nelson Mandela, who passed away recently, had said "I have cherished the idea of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal for which I am prepared to die"⁶ Vision contains a scientific analysis of the past and identifies the causes of the present discontentment. It gives also the direction for a new future. It helps one to analyze and identify whether one is on the right path or not. It is dynamic in the sense that it keeps on updating to ensure its relevance to the ever changing context on the one hand and the needs of a given poor people on the other. The one with a vision is a standing critique of the existing unjust society.⁷

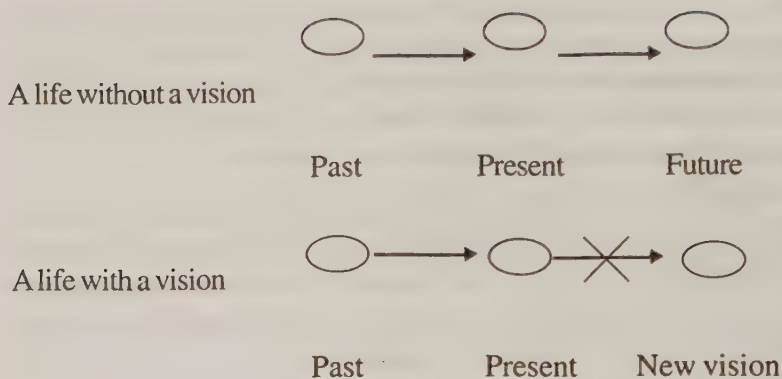
³ Kappen, S. *Jesus and Culture*, Delhi: ISPCK, (2002): 5.

⁴ Vision is a common theme in the Bible. For example the vision of a peaceful kingdom Is. 11:1-10; the vision of the dry bones coming to life Eze 37:1-14; the vision of New Heaven and Earth Rev. 21:1-5.

⁵ From a talk given by Bishop Yvon Ambroise to the Office- bearers of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) in Bangalore: on 07.08.2006.

⁶ V. Richard, *Fire on Earth*, Dumka: Pastoral Centre Publication, (2007): 1.

⁷ *ibid.*, Bishop Yvon's talk,



The catholic leader of tomorrow should be a person of such vision which includes a macro and micro analysis of our present world and the Church from the perspective of the poor like Jesus. The realization of this vision will be carried out not only by Christians among themselves but also in solidarity with all people of good will in the world. All our liturgy⁸, education, health-care and social work need to reflect the materialization of this vision to enhance and enrich the life of the poor and through them the welfare of all.⁹

Prophetic Leadership

Through baptism Christians come to participate in the threefold ministry of Jesus, namely priestly, kingly and prophetic. In our unjust and dehumanizing world today, it is the prophetic leadership that must stand out. It is true that we need all the three ministries in the Church. But to effectively address today's unjust situation, the priestly and kingly ministries should come under the umbrella of prophetic leadership.

⁸ "The liturgy, which we preside over and which is the heart of the Church's life, can greatly serve education for justice..... The liturgy of the word, catechesis and the celebration of the sacraments have the power to help us to discover the teaching of the prophets, the Lord and the Apostles on the subject of justice." (Pope Paul VI, Justice in the World, 1971, No. 58).

⁹ Sarvodaya, the welfare of all through antiyodaya, the welfare of the last and the least.

Both, individuals (Jn. 4:19; 9:17) and people (Jn. 6:14; 7:40; Lk. 7:16) recognized Jesus as a great prophet. When Jesus enquired his disciples about his identity, the response of the disciples, was that he was a prophet in the line of Elijah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist (Mt. 16:13-14 cfr. also Mt. 21:46; Lk. 24:19; Jn. 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17). Jesus himself accepted this identity (Lk. 4:24). His conviction sprang from his prophetic consciousness when he says "a prophet is not without honour except in his own country" (Mk. 6:4) and that "It is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem" (Lk. 13:33). Jesus continued the prophetic message of great concern for the poor (Mt. 5:3; Lk. 4:18-19; 6:20). The prophetic character is the key to Jesus' mission and the title 'prophet' describes the Jesus of history. Without this prophetic dimension, it would be extremely difficult to understand the subversive praxis of Jesus.¹⁰

When Jesus spoke about the impossibility of serving both God and money, the Pharisees who loved money scoffed at him (Lk. 16:14). The leadership of the Scribes and the Pharisees was branded by Jesus as blind leading the blind (Mt. 15:14). For their headship (based on legal and traditional religious authority) did not seriously take into account the socio-political-economic and cultural context.

Since Jesus' leadership was contextually prophetic, he had to face conflicts from the beginning of his ministry (Mk 2-3:6 the five conflicts) till the end. The cleansing of the temple by Jesus (Jn. 2:13-22) was the peak of this conflict. Firmly rooted into the Abba experience, Jesus stood up to such conflicts and confrontations and thus proved his unparalleled quality of prophetic leadership.

Following the footsteps of Jesus, the leadership of the Catholic Church in India of tomorrow needs to be prophetic. This means working to transform the unjust society into a just one through the prophetic charism in solidarity with the victims.¹¹

¹⁰ George M. Soares-Prabhu, *Biblical Spirituality of Liberative Action*, Scaria K. ed., Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, (2003): 126-134.

¹¹ "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world (society) fully appear to us as a *constitutive dimension* of the preaching of the Gospel" (Justice in the Word, *op.cit.*, No. 6)

Counter-Cultural Leadership

Jesus' attitude towards Jewish culture was both critical and creative. Jesus was critical towards the enslaving and dehumanizing elements of Jewish culture. He simultaneously and creatively contributed to those aspects of Jewish culture which were liberating and enhancing humans. Being deeply rooted in Jewish culture, he also transcended its taboos and reached out to the poor sinners, lepers, women etc. (Mk. 2:13-17; 1:40-45; Jn. 4:1-42). The best counter-cultural action parable was his table-fellowship that delivered a mortal blow to the hierarchical, socio-cultural fabric of his society. He vehemently criticized the Pharisees for making void the Word of God to uphold human made traditions and customs (Mk. 7:13).

Values form the core of any culture. Often enough these values are embedded in unwritten and un verbalized norms and laws which influence people's judgment and behavior. These values are normally the values of the dominant imposed upon and often interiorized by the dependent, because it is the dominant who possess and control the means of information dissemination.

In a sense, it is relatively easy to change social structures than value structures. Therefore, the leadership of tomorrow like Jesus himself has to identify and expose the apparently noble values, which actually are to the advantage of the dominant, and announce the counter-values which express the Good News of humanizing love. This would lead to the desired social transformation in tune with the values of the Kingdom of God. Because of the inseparable, dynamic relationship between values and social structures the leader has to, at once, work for the transformation of both. Hence, again, for the same reason, the mission of a leader is never apolitical.

Further, the leadership of tomorrow should be able to create new religious symbols, values, rites, parables, myths, proverbs etc, which are liberative. Liberative concepts alone are not sufficient for the common people.

Shepherding-Servant Leadership

The catholic leadership of tomorrow will have to be Shepherding-Servant leadership. Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life

for his sheep (Jn. 10:11). He came not to be served but to serve and offer his life as ransom (Mk. 10:45). Jesus discerned and discovered the rich untapped resources of the unorganized sheep, namely the poor. He made them feel their own greatness as God's children by loving them. The poor felt accepted and loved by Jesus. He almost had his home in their midst unlike their religious and political leaders. These poor became the *new basis of power for Jesus* as opposed to the religious and legal power of the Jewish leaders.

Today the basis of power is money, technical know-how, control over communication media, upper caste birth, control over people through the State machinery, etc. Fr. Felix Wilfred calls this *mechanistic power* which can dehumanize and stifle the rich resources of the people. The new basis of power, he says should be *human persons* with their rich moral, social and spiritual resources. The catholic leadership of tomorrow should unearth these human resources of the poorest of the poor, make them realize their own resources, instill self-confidence into them and mobilize them as Jesus did.¹²

Jesus, a New Model of Leadership

Jesus cautions his disciples that they should never imitate the leadership of the Jewish elders and that of the Gentiles. He proposes *a new model of leadership to his disciples* who were vying with one another for high position of power as was evident from the request of the mother of James and John to sit at Jesus' right and left in glory. When the other ten came to know of it, they were very angry with James and John (Mk. 10:35-41). So Jesus gave them a *shock treatment by washing the feet of his disciples* (Jn. 13:1-17).

The Evangelist John says that Jesus, *fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power*,¹³ began to wash the disciples' feet (Jn. 13-3-5). He puts this power of God at the humble service of washing the feet of the disciples and at the service of the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned ones (Mt. 25:31-46). With great love he served them even to the point of being killed, and he calls the leaders of tomorrow to do the same (Jn 12:24-

¹² Felix Wilfred, *From the Dusty Soil: Contextual Reinterpretation of Christianity*, University of Madras, Chennai, (1995): 201-220.

¹³ Cf. *The New American Bible translation*

26).¹⁴ 'I have set you an example of my new type of leadership of service, that you also should do as I have done to you' (cf. Jn. 13:15).

Jesus wants servant leadership which will be at the service of others especially the poor to enhance their human dignity and develop their integral growth as human persons. Besides, the leader is expected to be the '*slave of all*'. It means that the master's self should become the self of the slave who has no self of his own. In the exercise of leadership, people are the masters and the new type of leader will seek the well-being and the interests of the people over whom the leadership is exercised. This is what Paul says: 'Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind (attitude) be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Phil 2:5).

Lay Leadership of Tomorrow

When one hears of leadership in the Catholic Church, one immediately thinks only of bishops and then may be of priests and the religious. But leadership in the Church should include lay leadership as they form 98% of the catholic population, the actual force indeed.

All people of God participate in the threefold ministry of Jesus Christ through baptism and confirmation. Baptismal priesthood is the fundamental and primary priesthood of all believers. Priesthood of the ordained ministers should be at the service of the priesthood of the laity through the Word and Sacraments, so that the lay people exercise their leadership both in the Church and in the world. Their specific leadership is in the temporal world (Apostolate of the Laity, 7). Engaging in temporal world means exercising their leadership in different areas of the world such as mass media, culture, art, politics, economics etc.¹⁵ They are the animating leaven in the world (Church 33,38) capable of transforming it through Gospel values (Church's Missionary Activity, 15). *Thus they become the voice of the Church in the secular world and voice of the secular world in the Church.*

In order that the laity may thus exercise their leadership especially in the temporal world today, they need sound and solid formation. Compared

¹⁴Astrid Lobo Gajiwala, "Gospel Leadership", in *Vidyajyoti*, April, (1996): 224.

¹⁵ Cf. Pope Paul VI. *Evangelization in the Modern World*, 1975, No. 19.

to the long and costly formation of the clergy and religious who form just 2% of the Catholics, the less expensive lay formation lags far behind. "Formation of lay men and women is one of the most urgent priorities in the Church."¹⁶ "Civic and political education is today supremely necessary for the people especially young people. Such education should be painstakingly provided, so that all citizens can make their contribution to the political community" (Church in the modern world, 75). Lay leadership formation should help the laity to internalize the vision of Vatican II (the unwritten agenda), the spirit of the Social Teaching of the Church and Jesus' vision of God's reign in today's context. They should be made to realize *that political awareness, civic involvement and action for justice towards creating a new social order are constitutive dimensions of the vocation of the laity in the temporal world.*

The felt need today is that the lay leadership in our country should critically and creatively network with all groups and forces of similar vision and values and with the new movements for a new ethical and moral order. They have to do *socio-cultural-auditing* to make the State and the Church to become more accountable and responsible to the poor people.

Conclusion

Nelson Mandela who was prepared to lay down his life for the realization of his vision of creating a democratic and free society is an appropriate model of leadership for today and for tomorrow. Here we may also recall to our memory the leadership provided by Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji in our country. In the twelfth century the exemplary leadership of St. Francis of Assisi, who was married to Lady Poverty, radically challenged the feudal society of his time, as well as the Church. In the 1980s the inspiring leadership of Bishop Oscar Romero who was shot dead for upholding the rights of his people is yet another example. For all these leaders there was one thing in common, all identified themselves with the oppressed poor people of their times and made powerful interventions and caused effective repercussions in their societies for both personal as well as societal transformation. Each and everyone one of us is called to exercise this liberating leadership today after the great model of historical Jesus.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Church in Asia*, 1983, No. 45.

Promotion of Dalit Leadership in the Indian Church

S. Lourduswamy

Denial of Leadership to Dalit Christians

The first dwellers of India and sons of the soil were made untouchables by Aryan Invaders. Equality and Leadership were denied to them. The Indus Valley civilization describes the noble life of Dalit community and Vedic literature portrays suppression of this community by the invaders. The Constitution of India in 1950 provided all the safeguards and rights of reservation to Scheduled Caste (Dalits) for regaining their lost image and leadership. Unfortunately, the same S.C. rights and reservation facilities are denied to Scheduled caste converts to Christianity (Dalit Christians) by the promulgation of presidential order "Constitution (Schedule Caste) order 1950", on the basis of religious conversion.

This policy of Social justice of the government extended Schedule Caste Rights and privileges. They are given to Dalits according to the percentage of S.C population. While Dalits in Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism enjoy the rights of reservation and Constitutional safeguards, Dalit Christians are denied the due S.C Status and the rights attendant on it by the government. The state commissions including the "Justice Ranganath Misra Commission irrefutably proved the fact that Dalit Christians continue to suffer discrimination and disabilities on par with their counterparts in other religions. Therefore, the government was asked to extend Scheduled Caste Rights to Dalits in Christianity and Islam. A writ petition was also filed in the Supreme Court with the prayer of deletion of 3rd para of Constitution Scheduled caste order 1950.

Discrimination in the Indian Church

Early missionaries were following the policy of adaptation and viewing caste not as a religious but social factor. The missionaries accommodated the practice of caste customs of the new converts for the sake of evangelization. The tolerance of caste discrimination continues even today and the Dalit leadership is denied in the Indian Church due to the traditional practice of untouchability.

There are so many well-known cases of practice of untouchability and discrimination in the Church. Let me refer here to most recent ones against Dalit Catholics in Thachure of Chengelpet Diocese and Eraiyur of Pondicherry Archdiocese. These practices of untouchability were published by Indian secular Media and made widely known in the country. Such incidents of discrimination only show that statements, resolutions and action Plans declared by the Heads of the Church for empowerment and leadership to Dalit Catholics were not fully realized in action.

Holy Father's appeal for Dalit Empowerment

His Holiness John Paul II on 17 November, 2003 addressed a group of Bishops from Tamilnadu. To them he said, "They (Christians of SC origin) should never be segregated from other members of society. Any semblance of a caste-based prejudice in relations between Christians is a countersign to authentic human solidarity, a threat to genuine spirituality and a serious hindrance to the Church's mission of evangelization. Therefore, customs and traditions that perpetuate or reinforce caste division should be sensitively reformed so that they may become an expression of solidarity of the whole Christian community."

CBCI General Body statement at

Varanasi 21-28 March, 1998

Referring to discrimination of Dalit Christians within the Church, the bishops said: "It is a cause of sorrow and expression of our inability to live our Christian faith adequately. It is not only a denial of human dignity and equality but also against the fundamental teaching of Christ. Hence, discrimination against anybody on the basis of caste is a sin against God and humanity. The church must take a clear stand against caste discrimination and declare it a sin. *This must be taught in*

Catechism and homilies and any form of discrimination must be completely stopped, wherever it exists, be it among the priests, in religious communities, in practices of selection of candidates for priesthood and religious life and in the sphere of administration”.

CBCI General body Statement Feb- 2012, Bangalore

“Recognizing the untouchability and caste discrimination is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus, we will root out this evil and make concerted efforts to empower Dalits. We commit ourselves to join hands with our Dalit brothers and sisters in their fight for equal rights and Constitution benefits which are denied to them on the basis of religion. *We assure the marginalized and weaker sections that we will do everything possible to train and equip them for leadership positions at local, regional and national levels.*”

Tamil Nadu Bishops Statement, Oct 2004

There was declaration of 10 points program for Dalit Empowerment in 1990 by Tamil Nadu Bishops' Council. It was revised and published as 8 points programmes for Empowerment and Dalit Leadership on 16th Oct 2004 in Tiruchirapalli. Action plan 5 ensures participation of Dalit in the administration and Dalit leadership in the Church but it is not fully realized. But facts show that when very suitable Dalit priests candidates are available to positions of bishop and very experienced Dalit bishops were available for position of archbishops, they were all sidelined. Many things seem to be shrouded in mystery in the process of selection and appointment of bishops. It is important to have a serious consultative process with the Dalit bishops to avoid the danger of manipulation, the influence of connections, cronyism and favoritism on the bureaucracy. Probably we will need a Dalit monitoring body – a practice followed by the state - so that suitable Dalit candidates in appointments are not left out.

Denial of Leadership to Dalit Christians in Church

Unfortunately, the heads of Roman decasteries are misled by Indian dominating Caste Church leaders. The true facts of Indian situation and the plight of Dalit Christians have not been properly presented to the decision making bodies of Vatican. To argue on the basis of merit is to

follow the same argument made by the Brahmins and upper caste people, ignorant of the complex Indian situation and the issue of caste and its dynamics and the philosophy behind reservation. Distorted image of Indian Church is given to authorities in appointing the leaders in the Indian Church. The emergence of Dalit leadership is being suppressed and discrimination is perpetuated. The Caste Church Leaders who enjoy the power is not willing to share the power with the poor and I am afraid, they may not promote hierarchical, ecclesiastical and secular leadership from Dalit community.

Denial of Hierarchical leadership to the untouchables in the Church

STATISTICS-2013

Catholics	Total Number	Dalit Catholics No	Dalit %
Cardinals	4+2=6	Nil	Nil
Archbishops	30	Nil	Nil
Catholic Bishops	175	9	4.5%
Major Superiors	822	12	1.5%
Catholic Priests	27000	1130	5%
Religious Sisters	100000	4500	5%
Total Catholics	20 Millions	11.5 Millions	65%

Note: The Catholic data are taken from *The Catholic Directory of India 2013* of CBCI, and of data on Dalit Catholics are taken from the records of CBCI – SC/ST Commission.

The Leadership statistics of Indian Church reveals the injustice and discrimination in the Church. Leadership in the administration of the Church such as Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, Heads of Religious Congregations, Heads of the Institutions are enjoyed by the Minority Catholics community in the Church. Therefore, the majority of Dalit Catholics 65% have only less than 5% of Leadership in the administration of the Indian Church.

A change in the situation could take place only when Heads of Vatican congregations, Apostolic Nuncio in India, Archbishops and Bishops begin to understand Dalit realities and sufferings and are genuinely in solidarity with them. The Church leaders must identify themselves with the marginalized and weaker sections to transform the life of the struggling community to fulfill Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God. It would be sad if Church-authorities do not have even as much knowledge and awareness about Dalit question as the leaders in the secular society in India and abroad.

European Union Empowers Dalits

The European Parliament which represents half a billion people in 23 member states passed a historic resolution on Oct 10, 2013, recognizing caste-based discrimination and discrimination based on work and descent as violation of human rights and obstacle to development. The European parliament calls on European Commission, the administrative arm of European Union, to recognize caste as a distinct form of discrimination which is rooted in social or religious context and needs to be tackled together with other forms of discriminations. European Parliament calls for European Union Bodies to include a clause on caste discrimination in all trades and association agreements and to promote affirmative actions for development of Dalits. It assures elimination of Caste practice.

Lessons from the Indian Constitution for the Practice of the Gospel

The Indian government does so much by way of reservation and affirmative action of social justice by giving Scheduled Caste (SC) Constitutional right of reservation and other statutory privileges according to the percentage of SC population. The similar gesture of social justice is not followed by the Indian Church for Dalit Catholics. Therefore the

Universal Church (Vatican) must have the policy of social Justice and solidarity with the Dalits in creating ecclesiastical and hierarchical leadership from untouchable Community in the Church.

God came down to liberate his own suffering children of Israel from the bondage of Egyptian King (Ex.3:8). Mother Mary was Empowered and elevated from lowly status (Lk. 1:48). In Nazareth declaration of His Mission Jesus assured “*Good news to the poor and liberation to the oppressed*” (Lk. 4:18), and He fulfilled his Mission by selecting his own apostles from poor community and empowered them to be the leaders of the Church.

Conclusion

In his recent Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* the Holy Father Pope Francis powerfully expresses his concern for the poor and for neglected communities (para nos 41, 42, 46, 59, 180, 219, 286). Justice and equality to the poor are very much stressed in the Apostolic Exhortation for the meaningful Proclamation of the Gospel.

The caste discrimination and denial of due leadership to Poor Dalit Catholics are the main barriers for Evangelization and future growth of the Indian Church. The Scope of extension of the Church in India can be realized only by extension of leadership to Dalit Christians. The Church in India needs Dalit hierarchical leadership, so also in the religious orders, besides lay leadership, and this is crucial for the growth of the Indian Church in future

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Rethinking Church-Leadership in India In the light of Pope Francis ¹

Felix Wilfred

The Change of Mood

Capturing some of the traits of Pope Francis' leadership, *Time* magazine notes:

At a time when the limits of leadership are being tested in so many places, along comes a man with no army or weapons, no kingdom beyond a tight fist of land in the middle of Rome, but with the immense wealth and weight of history behind him, to throw down a challenge. The world is getting smaller; individual voices are getting louder; technology is turning virtue viral, so his pulpit is visible to the ends of the earth. When he kisses the face of a disfigured man or washes the feet of a Muslim woman, the image resonates far beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church. ²

Yes, there is a breadth of universality in this leadership reaching out to the entire humanity in the spirit of inclusion, compassion and openness. In recent decades we had *two* pontificates marked, by and large, by European concerns. John Paul II was bent on saving the church from godless atheism, coming as he did from the experience of a socialist

¹ Due to lack of space I am not able to include here the copious foot-notes and references I prepared for this contribution. I intend to include them in another expanded version of this text for future publication. The references given here are absolute minimum.

² The issue carries different features of Pope Francis as the Person of the Year. *Time* December 23, (2013): 26.

totalitarian regime of cold war times, and very apprehensive of liberation for fear of Marxism. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI wanted to redeem the Church from secularism, relativism and heterodoxy which were viewed to have been the cause for the decline of the Church in Europe.³ The ideal Christianity was projected backwards to the times of Christendom to be achieved through integralism and reestablishing of old certainties. Pope Francis has brought about a springtime of faith, love and hope. For the first time in decades Christianity is again brought back to its essentials; it is a matter of *doing* as Jesus did, and not primarily a matter of purity of doctrine. In this shift to Christian *praxis* we have come to realize the nature and quality of Christian leadership in a new light.

We in India and probably in much of the developing world understand the language Pope Francis speaks because what he does and says mirror our own experiences and our own vision for the Church and its future. There is a general sense of relief and a lot of hope. We also feel that what he says and does has impact on the larger society – beyond Christian communities. For one thing he has put his finger on the right spot, on causes most important for the life of the Church and of the world.

But what makes this Pope so important is the speed with which he has captured the imagination of millions who had given up hoping for the church at all... Francis has elevated the healing mission of the Church – the church as servant and comforter of hurting people in an often harsh world – above the doctrinal police work so important to his recent predecessors.⁴

New Signs and Symbols

In an age of greater consciousness of human freedom, it is important that communication happens without imposition, but at the same time effectively and persuasively. Christianity, for that matter any religion, lives on symbols and signs which are crucial to convey what it stands for. Many of the signs of Pope Francis – washing the feet of prisoners which included two women and a Muslim, abdicating the past symbols

³ On the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, see my article in *Concilium*, (2013/2): 123-127.

⁴ *Time*, December 23, (2013): 33.

and signs of papal pomp and pageantry, visiting the refugees and homeless, entering right into the slums of Rio de Janeiro, taking initiative to write to an atheist answering his questions⁵, his frank confession “I am a sinner but I trust”⁶ - all these and numerous other signs point to a new brand of leadership in the Church.

To put it differently, a leader is like a poet. Poetry is something creative. It is not meant simply to convey some abstract truth. Like symbols, poetry is meant to evoke. A good poet evokes a whole world and brings before our eyes a new vision of reality. That is what a true leader does. The Church itself is a sign – and indeed a sign and instrument of the Kingdom of God. It evokes the ideal of the Kingdom of God and stirs up our potentials and imagination. As such leaders in the Church need to be the ones who point to a different world and inspire hope that this new and different world is possible.⁷

Unhealthy Models of Leadership

Jesus himself indicated what an unhealthy model of leadership is. It is the will to dominate and lord over (Mt 20:25) which is explicit or implicit in various models of leadership. The *monarchical and centralized model* has it that the leaders concentrate all powers and decisions on themselves. They create a controlled society or community. There is a benevolent variant of this when a leader turns paternalistic, treats everyone as children and refuses to have adult relationship and mutuality with the members of the community. Then, there is the *feudal model* of leadership in which the leader as “lord” becomes the central point of reference and the relationship is based on loyalty. The leader is distinguished from the rest by paraphernalia of symbols and signs and surrounded by courtiers who isolate the leader from the rest. Rewards and punishments are meted out by the lord on the basis of the extent of loyalty and obeisance or lack of it. Such a leadership creates servility and hypocrisy among the subjects ruled over. Finally, there is the

⁵ It refers to the letter Pope Francis wrote to Eugenio Scalfari. See *L'Osservatore Romano* [English edition] 18 September, 2013.

⁶ Interview to Antonio Spadaro, editor-in-chief of *Civiltà cattolica*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 September, 2013.

⁷ See a special issue of *Concilium* 2004/5 “A Different World is Possible”.

managerial and bureaucratic model which is focused on success and in efficient running of the organizational machinery. Such a leadership could become impersonal and wanting in vision and in innovation. One would find expressions of all these models in the leadership in the Church - whether by priests, religious or bishops. Often the models are combined.

Thanks to the unhealthy models, leadership both in the world and in the Church is in deep crisis. There is so much of corruption, lack of transparency, favouritism and violation of human rights in the exercise of power. No wonder our world is weary of formal claims to authority. The *Aam Admi* movement in the country today is a challenge to abuse of power and lack of leadership serving the community. It seems to have lot of lessons for the Church to place the people at the centre and understand leadership as service. As it is said, the least government is the best government. This is true also of authority and leadership. True authority and leadership does not make its weight felt. Generally it is the type of leadership that is empty and has lost its authenticity and credentials, which wants to ensure its hold by invoking formal authority and throws to the winds the principles of subsidiarity and decentralization.⁸ At bottom, the validity of the commands and directions of the authority is not to be tied to his or her will, which will be arbitrary. They have to conform to the fundamental canons of human dignity and rights and contribute to common good for its validity, which allows room for civil disobedience in the case of failure.

Respecting the Subjecthood of People and their Experiences

One of the aspects of our contemporary times is the attention to the subject. We owe to people respect because they are images of God which truth is concretely expressed through their freedom, and the gifts, talents and charisma with which they are endowed. The unhealthy models of leadership have all one thing in common – they fail to respect the dignity, subjecthood and agency of human persons which is a central piece of Christian faith and anthropology. They also share a disregard

⁸ Pope Francis speaks of the necessity of “a sound decentralization”. *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 16.

to the action of God in the life and experience of human beings. "God is a subject who makes himself [*sic*] known and perceived in an interpersonal relationship", so writes Pope Francis.⁹ Human beings participating in the mystery of God and reflecting it are also known through interpersonal relationships, and this needs to be respected by the leaders in all dealings in the Church. Refusing to listen to the voice of God speaking every moment through the experience of people is sheer arrogance. The model of servant leadership Jesus projects for his community is not only in performing actions; it implies as well the humility to attentively listen to God's voice through human beings.

Detached Leaders

It is pathetic to see some of the Church-leaders continuing to hold on to their office with extremely poor-health, and not able to discharge the duties of the responsible position they occupy. If not faith-conviction, at least a modicum of self-respect should persuade them to call it a day, and make room for younger people with energy and vision to lead the Church. Many major religious superiors manipulating the election; members of religious orders doing overtly and covertly canvassing in the name of caste, language, ethnic group and in the process tarnishing the good names to which people are entitled; parish priests wanting not to move out or aspiring for bigger parishes with greater economic benefits - these have become daily experiences in the Indian Church.

Looking at this situation, I am reminded of Plato who said the ideal ruler is a philosopher.¹⁰ Philosophers are people who are persons of wisdom and who are detached from personal agenda and benefits. What Plato wanted to say was that only a person who is detached, and with no vested interests will be able to lead the people. In Jesus' thought, the one who does not look back (Lk 9:62), the one who denies himself or herself,

⁹ *Lumen Fidei* no. 36

¹⁰ *The Republic*, 5. 473d. Plato also employed the image of pilot of a ship to describe the leader. "[A] true pilot must of necessity pay attention to the seasons, the heavens, the stars, the winds, and everything proper to the craft if he is really to rule a ship" *The Republic*, 6.488d. Today we would say that a true leader is someone who is able to read the signs of the times.

that is not conditioned by his or her attachment and prejudices, and carries the cross (Mt 16:24) will be his disciple and a leader in the Kingdom of God. Such leaders will also be marked by fearlessness, what the Acts of the Apostles calls *parasia* (Acts 4:13). This is today a very necessary virtue for all leaders.

How Good Managers?

There is often the complaint that leaders in the Church turn out to be bureaucratic and managerial. But how true is this? Ironically, even from a mere managerial point of view, they have very little professional knowledge in management, and what they do is often a hotchpotch. The clericalization in the Church is so strong, that the fact of ordination becomes legitimation for claims of professional knowledge the clerics do not possess.¹¹ As a result, the responsibilities that could be professionally discharged by the laity qualified in particular fields are entrusted to priests and religious. These being part of the power-structure, unfortunately, do not let professionalism lead, inflated as they are by positions of power. Lack of professionalism combined with the refusal to share power and responsibility has resulted, for example, that many dioceses and religious orders have made colossal mismanagement of properties and other material assets, not to mention the damages they have done to human persons. Cases in this regard abound. There are no lessons learnt. Incompetent clerics and religious, who could be better controlled by bishops and major superiors than the laity, continue to hold positions where they should not be. The science of management has so advanced today that it lays emphasis on communication, on sharing of responsibility, team-work and so on. Even these pragmatically oriented strategies of management are wanting among most leaders in the Church.

The Fear of the Messy and the Ambiguous

A lot of good remains undone by the Church-leaders for fear of getting into messy situations, or having to face ambiguous moments. But history and experience show that tall leaders like Gandhi, Ambedkar

¹¹ Cf. Felix Wilfred, "Missionnaires laïcs dans un monde décléricalisé et une Église autonome", in *Spiritus* LIV (2013): 339 ff.

and Mandela were ones who faced the roaring waves and raging storms, and dared to struggle with realities small leaders shy away because of pusillanimity. As for the Church, there is a false sense of perfection. One imagines that to keep the Church perfect is not to get mixed up with what could be messy by turning it into a safe haven – the arch of Noah. The mystery of incarnation shows, on the other hand, how God enters into the world in the midst of all its disarray and messiness. That is what we are reminded of when Pope Francis tells us that he prefers “a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church...concerned with being at the centre and then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures”.¹² This has enormous consequences in terms of the type of leadership required today.

From Princes to Servants

Pope Francis wants the leaders in the Church to be humble servants according to the Gospel. He is woefully aware of the princely mind-set of some of the prelates in the Church who cultivate a feudal way of life surrounded by a courterie which never ceases to sing hosanna, fired by the spirit of careerism. This tendency is fast spreading among the religious as well. Superiors, provincials and generals seek special privileges not only during their tenure of office, but also after that. Times were, when a major superior retired from office, went to become an ordinary member of his or her religious community, setting good example. Today, they look for career promotions and greener pastures after their demitting of office, and look for comfortable way of life. There are numerous cases of major superiors who have built their post-retirement mansions leading a secluded life from the community and surrounded by privileges.

That the pope does not remain only with words and is very serious about this matter has been witnessed in two recent cases. The one relates to the German Bishop of Limburg, Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst, who seized by megalomania renovated his bishop's palace for nothing less

¹² *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 49

than 31 million Euros, causing a public scandal among the people who were already bitter about his authoritarian style of functioning.¹³ A second case relates to Cardinal Raymond Burke who is known to dress in excess in flowing silk and with elegant outfits like most costly mitre, crozier, pectoral cross, rochet and cassock. In a bold step Pope Francis has removed him from the influential congregation of bishops. Someone like that to be among those who discern and choose bishops as servants of the Gospel was to tempt God excessively. In this way Pope Francis has matched his words with deeds. Experiences like these prompted the pope to say, "Heads of the Church have often been narcissists, flattered and thrilled by their courtiers".¹⁴

The consciousness of power when wrapped with insignia and symbols of rank could lead to delusion and forgetfulness of hard actual realities of life. At this point I cannot resist narrating what I heard from a Sri Lankan friend about a bishop travelling from North of the country to the south during the period of war and violence there. The bishop was travelling with his secretary and a sister seated in front next to the driver. The car of the bishop was stopped by the military at several points for routine controls when everyone had to get out of the car for body-check. At one of those check-posts, when the vehicle was stopped, the sister to spare the bishop from the inconvenience of getting down and undergoing check, communicated in a telegraphic language to the soldier who knew no English. Trying to make the soldier understand in his own army language, she said, pointing to the bishop, "Church ...captain; Church...captain". Hearing this, the soldier let go the car. But then the bishop was very upset. He asked the sister, "Sister, don't you know who I am? I am not captain of the Church...I am a general!" Well, that much for rank consciousness and that too when a country is burning with violence.

¹³ On this case, see the article of Johannes Hoffmann "The Case of Bishop of Limburg: Any Lessons for Global Church?" in *Concilium* 2014/2 (shortly to appear).

¹⁴ Interview to Eugenio Scalfari, editor of the Italian daily *La Repubblica*, 1 October, 2013

We find Pope Francis the least conscious of his position as the pontiff. Even though the millennial old institution of papacy has some of the most grandiose traditions of pomp, pageantry and grandeur, he has voluntarily renounced those privileges and signs of rank, and has chosen to pay by himself his hotel bills, to live in a community - the community of Casa Santa Marta in Vatican - with the simplest of facilities, to call people on his own and talk to them without attending to traditional protocols, diplomatic niceties and formalities, which all could insulate the pope from the ground realities. He has let the papal apartments remain more as a museum piece. His very first request to the people to bless him, spoke volumes and let us already see the direction of this new papacy and the type of leadership he was bringing in. These are potent signs the Indian Church and its leaders should pick up and put into practice.

Reconciling with the Legacy of the Past

For a section of Catholics, many things about Pope Francis are so novel that they are wondering how all this could be reconciled with what his immediate predecessors said and did. They are at a loss and uncomfortable about it. Some of them through a tortuous logic try to show, after all Pope Francis is saying the same thing as the previous popes. There is an effort to create a simplistic discourse of continuity. To view Pope Francis in this way, I think, would be totally to ignore what he is trying to convey in an unprecedented manner. There are others like Mario Palmaro with stubborn attachment to the past and the security of trodden path who goes to the point of stating "We do not like this pope".¹⁵ If this does not mirror the view of the entire perturbed segment of the Church, it is at least indicative of the difficulties and resistance Pope Francis, like any leader who refuses to conform to what has been, has to face in the months and years to come.

It is a fact, that the appointment of leaders in the Church in the past decades have left many things wanting. The immediate post-conciliar period saw a clear criterion in the appointment of bishops. They were people who were nourished by the spirit and teachings of the Council and capable of putting them into practice in their local churches. But we

¹⁵ Cf. *Time*, December 23, 44.

witnessed also the shift in these criteria towards candidates who could put up a stiff fight against liberation, who could conform to the system and safeguard “purity” of doctrine and liturgy. We should add also the thriving of certain very conservative movements in the Church – opus Dei, communion and Liberation, Neo-Catechumenate movement - under the last two pontificates - who probably influenced also the choice of bishops. As a result, today in the Church Pope Francis is faced with leaders for many of whom his values, priorities and his style of leadership could come across as a threat. Therefore, how much cooperation he is going to find with such leaders remains to be seen? It also indicates the troubles he is bound to face and the price he has to pay.

Leadership of All Believers

The clerical appropriation of leadership in the Church contradicts the truth that everyone in the Church, regardless of the particular state in which he or she is called to mission. Mission necessarily requires leadership. In doing their mission according to their calling the believers exercise their leadership. In this connection, I think, we have come to a stage in which we need to re-examine the way the laity are defined. Who are the laity? Laity are non-clerics, so goes the most common perception. Well, this kind of definition of laity in contrast to the clerics reminds me of the terminology of “non-Christians”. There is the large majority of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the country with their long tradition, history, philosophy, world-view, values and symbols. And yet all these we try to encapsulate by characterizing them as “non-Christians”. Christian becomes the point of reference in relation to which every other religious experience is defined. This strange nomenclature is no more tenable. We need to refer to them something like “peoples of other faiths” or by some similar expressions. In the case of laity, we lose all the richness of what Vatican II says about people of God when we define them in contrast to the clerics and not on the basis of the commonly shared fundamentals of Christian faith and life.

I think the root cause for the practical denial of leadership to the laity lies in the refusal to own the experience of the faith of individual believers as an important source for the life of the Church. On the contrary, faith

is already pre-determined and controlled by the clergy and its authority structure. And yet one of the great things about modernity is the recognition of the subjective which means human persons are viewed not as objects but as active agents. And this is true also in the realm of faith. A narrow vision of faith has ignored the legitimacy of individual experiences in their value as a contributor to the faith of the community. Defining the faith of the community cannot be reposed solely with the authority structures in the Church.

From a theological point of view, the understanding of revelation and God's word keep growing,¹⁶ and correspondingly the faith also gets deepened ever more with new experiences both of individual believers and of communities. Only when these hermeneutical and theological points are taken seriously into account, will one be able to see the leadership of the faithful in the world and in various realms of everyday life. The contextual living out of faith requires the leadership of all believers prescinding from the particular ministerial work they may be doing. Trying to put an end in the name of formal authority to this endless process of growth and development both in the understanding of God's Word and in faith, stunts the faith-life of the believers and makes the faith of the people dependent upon the clergy and hierarchy.

The world is not simply a matter of application of a faith already predetermined by a static and stagnant authority structure, to be carried out by the laity under its command. Living out faith in everyday life and in professional fields by the believers carrying their cross, following Jesus, has its own inner dynamics. The basic equality of all the faithful and their call towards the transformation of the Church and the world ever closer to the image of the Kingdom of God, is so overriding that the authority and leadership structure needs to submit itself to its logic and not set itself above this foundational truth.

Leadership in God's Mission

What distinguishes Church-leadership is the nature of its calling to something that comes from God's Word. Formulated differently, leadership is in view of the Kingdom of God which represents another

¹⁶ See *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II.

vision and value than the dominant ones in the world and the society. The quality of leadership in the Church is then to be determined by its ability to lead the individual Christian and communities to live out the implications of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of God. Church-authority loses its credibility and becomes empty when the call to “obedience” lacks reference to the mission, to the Kingdom of God. It becomes a reproduction of the worldly structures of power and authority, and not a reflection of the mission of the Kingdom of God.

If the Kingdom of God is the point of reference for leadership in the Church, all the believers, regardless of whether they are ordained ministers, or part of the hierarchy have the same objective of leadership. There is pluralism in leadership in the Church and there are different charisms of leadership. The different types of leadership need to enrich each other and mutually complement. This is a very different approach to leadership in the Church from the one which sees it associated exclusively with the hierarchy and the clergy. Surely, these have a leadership role in the Church. However, they do not represent the entire leadership which goes beyond them, since the leadership through which they serve the Kingdom of God remains inadequate and incomplete without other types of leadership with different charisms besides their own. For a Church which for centuries accustomed to view leadership almost exclusively as a matter of clergy and the hierarchy, the sole custodians of arcane truths of faith, it is difficult to accept the leadership of all believers. A more integral understanding of leadership can help overcome the crisis of authority the Church is facing today. Mission was so important that the Church in early centuries did not hesitate to adopt into its structures certain models of leadership from the world.

The leadership of believers is based also on the fact that the Holy Spirit has conferred on them a plurality of talents, gifts and charisms. Failing to incorporate in the life and governance of the Church these talents goes against the Spirit. It also deprives the community of these talents. A good leader in the Church will promote and encourage the contribution of various believers each one with his or her charism for the building up of the Church and for the service of the Kingdom of God.

Further, the principle of subsidiarity is one of the major principles in the social teachings of the Church, and applied to leadership, it means that what could be accomplished by the people in the governance of community, should not be taken over by higher instances of authority – by clergy and hierarchy.

One of the theological reasons for exaggerating the role of the clergy to the detriment of all other believers was Christo-monism, namely an understanding of Christ without reference to the Spirit and the Father. The clergy were seen as the sole representative of Christ whereas the role of the Spirit at work in all believers for the good the Church and of the world was forgotten; so too the witness they bear to the Kingdom of God through their life of faith, love and hope. Along with the Spirit, the believers who came to be characterized as “laity” in contrast to the clergy were also pushed to the margins. Theologically then, a recovery of a theology of the Holy Spirit is very essential for a correct understanding of the Church and the leadership role of all believers. In the immediate post-Constantine period, the seeking of Christian perfection by having recourse to the desert, inspired by the Spirit, gave rise to monastic tradition which was indeed a lay initiative, and in the course of time the monastic movement, unfortunately, got clericalized.

Leadership Empowering the Marginalized

The present condition of leadership in the world highlights the unique significance of servant-leadership Jesus projects as the ideal in the community of his disciples. I mean to say that the quality of leadership Jesus enjoins is not only for the Church-community; it is highly relevant for leadership as a whole. Implicit in Jesus’ teaching of servant leadership is that the community of his disciples should show a different model of leadership to the world where everyone with authority and in leadership position should become servants. For, ultimately the Church is for the world and its transformation in the light of the Kingdom of God.¹⁷

¹⁷For an overview of the context and challenges of leadership in India today, see Felix Wilfred, *Church’s Role for Better India* (Keynote address delivered at the 11th General Body Meeting of Catholic Council of India, Kochi: Renewal Centre, November 24 –m27, 2011).

Politically in the country the *Aam Admi* party which wants the leaders to be servants has found great resonance among the people, especially among the poor. The leader of this party Mr Arvind Kejirwal is projecting a leadership which stands in contrast to the way the political leaders are throwing around their power and influence and in the process get alienated from the people. We do not know the outcome of this effort. But at least we could find that it responds to the call of the common man that the leaders become truly servants – something which Jesus told his disciples two thousand years ago.

Promoting Women Leadership

The Church needs to read attentively the signs of the times in this regard. Things are changing fast in the country with more and more women involved in public and professional life and occupying positions of leadership. This is true also at the grassroots level with the active participation of women in various social movements and in non-governmental organizations. We have witnessed in recent times the role played by women self-help groups which have come to be an important force in the cultural, economic, social and political transformation of the country. The traditional patriarchal structures, values and mind-set are being challenged. And yet, we have in the Church a clergy and hierarchy who, in general, go about with the issue of women with attitudes of a bygone age. The patriarchal exercise of power and domination gets replicated at various levels in the structures of the Church and at the level of pastoral praxis. In most cases, women have nothing but token presence. Parishes flourish because of the active involvement of women in the Basic Christian Communities. And when they become part of the parish council and numerically larger than men, even then they are made to be mute spectators while a handful of men decide things and lay down policies, rules and regulations. The resources women represent in the Church need to be taken into confidence and nurtured at all levels – from parish to diocese and from the regional to national levels, and this cannot be done without involving them in decision-making processes.

The Gospels bear witness to the way Jesus incorporated women in his ministry, and the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letters show the active role they played in the Church-communities and in the service of the Gospel, no less than men.¹⁸ The Indian Church will need to pay ever more attention to this issue without delay.

Practice of Democratic Values by Church-Leadership

I have noticed that the very word “democracy” puts off many Church-leaders. Their immediate reaction is “*Church is not a democracy*”. This is a weapon of defence in the hands of many leaders who continue to maintain their autocratic ways. It is a statement that is conversation-stopper. With this one statement any serious discussion on governance in the Church is closed. Anything that spells threat to autocracy for them is anathema, and so is the discourse on democracy. It is also a way to keep off the faithful from participation and decision-making and simply think of them as *belonging* to a Church managed by the clergy and the hierarchy, instead of viewing them as the people of God making up truly the Church of God. Pope Francis deplores that laity are kept “away from decision-making” due to clericalism.¹⁹

Democracy is a much larger matter than election and the rule of majority. It is an important value based on faith which sees human beings as the image of God and endowed with freedom, understanding and the ability to enter into communion and form community in mutual respect. As Pope Paul VI noted in his *Octogesima Adveniens*, “Two aspirations persistently make themselves felt in these new contexts, and they grow stronger to the extent that human beings become better informed and better educated: the aspiration to equality and the aspiration to participation, two forms of human dignity and freedom”.²⁰ The values of democracy such as participation, common responsibility, collaborative action, respect etc. are values reflecting Christian faith and not against it. Even though election does not constitute all of democracy, some aspects of it was followed in the Church. This tradition continues in the election

¹⁸ For details, see the article in this issue of *Jeevadhara* by Hieronymus Cruz.

¹⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 102

²⁰ *Octogesima Adveniens* no. 22

of the Roman Pontiff, in the election practice within monastic and religious orders. For many centuries, as is well-known, bishops of the local churches were elected. In all these elections one sees not only the human element, but views it as the expression of the will of God through human agency.

Church leaders who argue that Church is a unique and different society and the worldly model of democracy cannot be applied to it, have strangely, no difficulty to accept the worldly model of monarchy in the exercise of leadership in the Church! If we set aside democracy and monarchy as systems and refer to the values each one of them represent, we cannot but come to the conclusion that democratic values are closer to the Gospel than those of monarchy in which spirit Church leadership is often exercised. Moreover, as Vatican II stated the Church needs to learn from the world as well. "Since the Church has a visible and social structure as a sign of her unity in Christ, she can and ought to be enriched by the development of human social life".²¹ We have come to a situation when the Church and Church-leaders need to learn from the world democratic values, which have been forgotten but which go to the heart of the Gospel.

Involvement of the Entire Local Church in the Choice of Bishops

Speaking from our Indian context today in which the Church lives as a minority and facing increasingly many intricate issues and question, it is not easy to discern the right candidates without the cooperation of the entire local Church. It is a terribly important issue. One needs to get rid of tokenism in this matter and find earnestly ways and means to involve the local Church. It has to go beyond the present practices and procedures shrouded in secrecy. History tells us how in the choice of bishops not only the clergy but the entire community of believers were involved. With greater politicization of the ecclesiastical offices, the nomination of bishops became privilege of kings and rulers until they were divested of it in the struggle against investiture, and subsequently the cathedral chapters were involved actively in the choice of bishops. The practice of early church also shows that the role of Bishop of Rome

²¹ *Gaudium et Spes* no. 44

in the choice of bishop was seen in relation to his position as the patriarch of the Western Church or in instances where problems arose.

We can speak of our Indian situation, which may be true also elsewhere in the global Church. In India the two Eastern Churches – Syro Malabar and Malankara (Major Archiepiscopal Churches), through their synod, elect the Major Archbishop and have a preponderant role in the selection of the candidates to episcopal office.²² The synod can assess the contextual situation closely and discern the candidates, something which papal legates with their relatively short stint of service and often due to their lack of adequate knowledge of the country, its culture, traditions and social structures, may not be in a position to do. It is too much to expect from them and the Roman decasteries to have a deeper and experiential understanding of so many complicated issues concerning the life of the people. What prevents the Latin rite Catholics of India from a similar practice followed by the sister Churches of Syro-Malabar and Malankara? One may cite the procedures laid down in Latin code of canon law. But then procedures are not a matter of divine but ecclesiastical right, and these could and should be changed.²³ While all the three Churches of India share the same social and cultural condition and history of the same nation, why should then the Latin Church be prevented from the practice in the appointment of bishops followed in other two Churches?²⁴

²² Cf. *Code of Canons of Eastern Churches*, can. 153. See also canons 181-186.

²³ This is a major issue. The new Latin code of canon law promulgated in 1983 was supposed to reflect the spirit and teachings of Vatican II. Further the Synod of 1971 came out with ten principles to guide the revision, including the principle of subsidiarity which, if rightly interpreted and codified, could allow greater agency and space for the local Churches in the choice of bishops. A revision of the code with greater conformity with Vatican II is a need to be able to come to terms with the experiences of Churches like ours in India. The growing diversity in the Church cannot be addressed adequately by the present code. Further, the style of Pope Francis' leadership would call for a revision of Church legislation, just as it necessitated a reform of the Roman Curia. I think without the revision of the Code, the reform of the Roman Curia will not be complete. On the Reform of the Roman Curia, see the special issue of *Concilium* 2013/5.

²⁴ Canon 378 – The Code of Canon Law – speaks of who is a “suitable candidate for the episcopate”. Five criteria are given, and none of them have any reference to the context – region, culture, history, tradition and problems which must be taken into account. There are, unfortunately, no provisions for assessing the suitability of a candidate with reference to a particular pastoral context.

Besides other considerations, in the present-day India we require candidates to the ministry of episcopacy who have leadership qualities in certain specific areas. In a situation of endemic communal conflict, we need leaders who have deeper understanding of the religious and caste-conflicts and have the skills of negotiation and ability to dialogue with peoples of other faiths. How seriously is this considered in the present choice of leaders? Further, the present socio-political conditions of poverty, growing inequality, injustice, exploitation, oppression of women, marginalization and exploitation of Dalits and tribals, environmental degradation etc. call for candidates who will be able to read into these and interpret the Gospel for the people and for the world. Since many of these issues are so well addressed in the social teachings of the Church, we cannot but raise the question, how well-equipped are the candidates nominated today for episcopacy in translating the social teachings of the Church in the Indian context? What about their option for the marginalized about which Pope Francis does not cease to remind the whole Church? *Gaudium et Spes* tells us that “Church at once a visible assembly and a spiritual community, goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family”.²⁵ If so, how does this reflect in the choice of leaders? How seriously are such criteria considered? What kind of procedure are required today to come to terms with these issues? A transparent consultative process with the entire Church – not only the clergy and hierarchy – will help identify appropriate leaders who will rise up to the challenges of the times both in the Church and in the world.

If we analyze further the matter, the roots of the problem seems to lie deeper. The social teachings of the Church need to nurture the understanding of the Church and its mission today. As it is, the ecclesiology and social teachings remain parallel and not integrated, in spite of the clear teachings of Vatican II. Hence in the choice of leaders the issue of

²⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* no. 40

social teachings does not figure in any significant way. This is a larger issue which I am not able to enter into here.

Are we turning the issue of the choice of bishops into something profane and worldly, while it should be treated as a matter of God's call and God's will?, One may wonder. But we must also point out that it is the constant teaching of the Church that the will of God is mediated through the human, and we need to make sure that the human channels are not cluttered and blocked and God's call is not misinterpreted. Moreover, the will of God is manifest not only through some in the Church, but through the entire community of believers which as the "body of Christ" is the continuation of Jesus Christ and which represent him in the world. Hence, the more consultation there is, the more participation of the whole Church happens; it will also be a sign that the choice of the bishop is truly the call of God.

Conclusion

One of the greatest blessings of the Indian Church is its human resources which are the most precious ones. Our human richness stands out in great relief when contrasted with the scene of convents, monasteries, religious houses of all kinds in the West closing down for lack of vocation. And yet, we do not make best use of it, for want of proper leadership. A good leader will be one who identifies and promotes the gifts and talents in the community and channels them for the common good. Hence one of the important things we need to attend to in future is the best use of human resources.

A second important concern is the leadership of all believers and their participation in the life and mission of the Church. As we noted earlier, they simply do not belong to the Church, but they are the Church. One has only to read the progressive transformation in the life of Bishop Oscar Romero who started off from a very traditional understanding of leadership but came to acknowledge and appreciate the leadership of the faithful.

It is an important point in the reception of Vatican II in India, to find to what extent the image of leadership in the Church has changed.

A close observation of the real situation in the Church in India will show how much more remains to be done to absorb the spirit and teachings of Vatican II for shaping the kind of leadership warranted by our context in India where the largest number of the poor are concentrated and where some of the worst forms of oppression continue to take place. Pope Francis is very clear on this point. He says that option for the poor is a theological one which means it is an option for the path of God. "This is why I want a Church that is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach".²⁶ We need to start thinking what are the implications of all this in the leadership of the Church. When we hear the pope and look at the actual reality, we realize there are miles to go.

To be able to follow the vision of leadership Pope Francis has indicated through his words, gestures and thoughts, Reform of the Roman Curia²⁷ is absolutely necessary – something he is now engaged in. I think logically the Reform of the Roman Curia should lead to the revision of the present code of canon law for the pope to be able to carry through the reforms he envisages. Such a revision will be advantageous for us in India and will open up the possibility for the choice of leaders in the Church who would respond to the challenges of the present times in our society.

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²⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 198

²⁷ Cf. Felix Wilfred, "The Reform of the Roman Curia", in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection* 77, no.8, (2013): 583-596.

Indian Church-Leadership of Tomorrow

Final Statement of an Ecumenical Consultation

1. An Ecumenical Consultation on *Indian Church-Leadership of Tomorrow* was held on 18-19 November 2013 at the Asian Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies (ACCS), Panayur, Chennai. It was jointly organised by ACCS and Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore Colleges (BTESSC). Participants were ministers, lay leaders, and social activists from Roman Catholic, CSI, Lutheran, Orthodox, Mar Thoma, and Independent Churches. As the conclusion of the discussions and deliberations of the Consultation, the participants wish to issue the following statement containing the vision, concerns and demands for the future leadership of the Church in India.

Leadership Today

2. It is indeed a joy to find good and effective leaders in the Indian Church. They selflessly serve the Church and the society, show openness in understanding their mission, and exercise their authority with a great sense of solidarity and in the spirit of collegiality. Without giving into temptations of demeaning power, they collaborate with others and exercise participatory leadership. The simple, unassuming, open and participatory style of leadership given by Pope Francis today offers immense hope for the future. We are in great appreciation of him and other such Church-leaders.
3. However, it is unfortunate that a considerable number of Church leaders fail to exercise an effective and participatory leadership.

They remain feudal in attitudes, exercise power like 'landlords', and 'shepherd' the people either in a dictatorial manner or with condescending paternalism. Such leaders are found in our Churches both as individuals and as collective power groups who work with their own vested interests. Giving scant regard to the principle of subsidiarity, they seek to impose themselves onto others and dominate over every sphere of the Church. They disregard the aspirations of the people to participate in the process of decision-making, and thereby fail to read the *signs of the times*.

4. We are pained to observe how some of these leaders are driven by scandalous interest in money, comfort, and fame; they exploit the facilities, institutional structures and personnel of our Churches for self-serving purposes; they 'lobby' with money and even muscle power for higher ecclesiastical posts, and cause serious scandal in the Churches and in the society.
5. We are dismayed to find today the re-emergence of the cultic leadership, which maintains the power of the clergy, and dissuades the participation of all God's people in the life and mission of the Churches. This type of leadership exhibits a preference for professional managerial skill in clerical ministry, adapts itself to modern sensibilities, but promotes a skewed interest in the cultic and clerical aspect of Christian leadership.
6. Unfortunately, these retrogressive types of leadership within the Churches share commonalities with similar types of leadership present in the world today. The contemporary world, while experiencing democratic and participatory leadership in some measure, is increasingly becoming a victim to feudal and autocratic leaders. Suffering from indulgence in vanity and encouraging hero-worship, these leaders induce and maintain a culture of uncreative and uncritical slave-mentality. They prevent the people from cultivating the spirit of autonomy and critical awareness. They do not hesitate to exploit the democratic institutions for aggrandizement of wealth and power. In this

process of exploitation, they are also aided by the brute power of corporate multinationals that evince keen interest in profit making rather than values, morals, and harmony. Presence of these types of leadership in the 'secular' as well as the ecclesiastical worlds reinforce one another and continuously reproduce a system of leadership which remains seriously estranged from the life-world of the people.

7. The struggles of the people are increasing day-by-day in the global era. Ill-effects of globalisation, liberalization, privatization, and massive industrialization by multinational corporations as well as local industrial giants are resulting in the rich becoming arrogantly rich and the poor becoming abysmally poor in our country, widening the gap of disparity. Among the poor people, the Dalits and the Tribals / Adivasis, particularly their women and children, are the worst affected, victimized and marginalised. Their agony of poverty is aggravated with such forms of systemic oppression as caste discrimination and patriarchy. Even the age-old evil practice of untouchability goes unchecked in several regions of our country.
8. The alarming rate of depletion of non renewable resources, once again due to the unchecked greed of the rich, has resulted in environmental destruction and imbalance. Construction of dams, nuclear plants, highways and mining have seriously affected the environment and the livelihood of Dalits, Tribals, Coastal Fish Workers, Women and the already marginalised communities.
9. The public institutions are being dominated by corrupt practices to scandalous proportions. Political parties, which are to organise the general will of the people for the practice of healthy democracy, are dominated by feudal powers or carried away by fundamentalist / communal forces which are involved in devising unwholesome methods to capture power. Communal violence, based on religion and caste, shows an increasing trend today.

10. These painful realities suffered by the poor, the Dalits, and subaltern people are not effectively addressed by secular or religious leadership. Even after 66 years of independence, Indian democracy has failed to mature into a participatory democracy with checks-and-balances. The Indian Church, which once served to bring the winds of democracy to our country, seems to have got accommodated to undemocratic forms and practices of leadership.
11. That the Dalit Christians, who constitute 60% of the membership of Churches, are not adequately represented in the leadership structures militates against the very spirit of participatory leadership. Similar is the case with the tribal people and women, who continue to suffer marginalisation within the Churches.
12. In some mainline Churches, people are never ever consulted or taken into confidence on the choice of their ministers. The selection and appointment of leaders in several churches are done in a secretive manner. The leaders are 'imposed' upon the people under the superficial understanding of God's will. The imposed leaders are systemically incapacitated to experience the 'sensus fidelium' as revealed through the life of the people of God. While this being the case in some mainline Churches, other Churches suffer from divisive forces born out of clashes between rival candidates, along with their factions, contending for top leadership posts.

The Inspiration of Our Faith

13. Our faith, on the other hand, inspires us with a vision of participatory, charismatic, prophetic and liberative leadership. The First Testament of the Bible presents leaders who *became* leaders by involving themselves in the freedom of the Israelites from different forms of oppression. They did not long or aspire to become leaders, but the responsibility came to them as a 'calling', a 'vocation' (cf. Ex. 4:10; Is. 6:5; Jer. 1:6; Amos. 7:14). Once they accepted the commission from God, they devoted

their lives totally to serve the Lord in the oppressed people. They did not *rule over* the people. Gideon's response, when asked by the Israelites to rule over them, is revealing. He said, "I will not rule over you ... the *LORD* will rule over you" (Judg. 8:23). So if at all there is a ruler, it is none other than God.

14. Jesus, through his words and deeds, proposed an 'exemplary leadership' that was counter to the type of leadership prevalent in his time. At the instance of the ten disciples being angry with James and John, whose mother asked for a prime place for her sons in the kingdom, Jesus told his disciples "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mt 20:25-28)." Jesus was willing to lay down his life for the sheep.
15. The early church exercised leadership in a participatory manner. The election of Mathias in the place of Judas Iscariot gives us an indication of the way believers participated in the process of decision making to elect leaders of the church (cf. Acts 1:21). When initiating the process of electing the new apostle, Peter addresses all the believers. The believers were involved in the whole process of election of the future apostle - starting with the deliberations (Acts 1:15), through the proposal (Acts 1:23) and the actual act of electing Mathias. So the believers' role in selection of the leaders is a biblically founded necessity.
16. In the long history of the Church too we find instances when the believers elected their leaders directly. The instance of St. Ambrose getting elected as a bishop, when he went to quell a riot, is a good example. Further down the lane of history, the very event of Reformation came as a reiteration of the place of the people in the life and leadership of the Church. It beckoned us to faith in the priesthood of all people of God, a vocation

which was to be cultivated through uncompromising dedication to faith and God's grace, as evidenced in the scripture. The whole event brought about a new vision of exercising leadership within the Church. Further on, the Second Vatican Council, in the life of the Catholic Church, brought about a new vision of the Church as the people of God, emphasizing the central place people occupied in the life of the Church. Leadership was cast in terms of collegiality, and the 'principle of subsidiarity' was proposed as a way of strengthening decentralization. The movement of Basic Christian Communities within the Catholic Church across the continents envisioned a new way of exercising spiritual as well as pastoral leadership, especially as exercised in and through parish pastoral councils. Beyond the mainline churches, today we are able to perceive an increasing momentum towards the decentralized participatory exercise of authority as found, for example, in Pentecostal and indigenous churches.

The Church Leadership of Tomorrow

17. Going by the inspiration of faith evident in our scripture and tradition, the Indian Church leaders have very challenging tasks ahead. They have to lead the Christians in faith and morals, amidst the realities of religious plurality, fundamentalism, religious communalism, bondages of casteism, poverty, etc. On the other hand, they are also called upon to play the public role of representing the community in wider public forums. This needs efficient and wise leaders who consider their leadership as a dedication to the divine call, and an invitation to share it with others in solidarity. It is this participatory leadership which will empower them to effectively meet the challenges ahead, and make them worthy channels of the unfolding of the Reign of God on earth. Keeping these in mind, we make the following demands:
18. Create participatory leadership structures wherein all God's people can participate and make the church a vibrant space to experience the transcendent rays of the mystery Divine. Make

conscious efforts to dismantle the feudal-casteist, dictatorial, and individual-centered power structures, and replace them with participatory structures of leadership. Make the consultative process mandatory for decision-making as regards choice of leadership, and, adoption and implementation of pastoral policies and programmes.

19. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, we demand a process of substantial consultation with the local faithful when it comes to appointment of bishops. It would do well that the regional councils of bishops involve themselves actively in the process of searching and selecting the bishops, as it happens within the Roman Catholic Oriental churches. Any imposition of bishops without a sincere and serious consultative process is an insult to the local church, and goes against the spirit of participatory leadership evident in the early Church. The local bishops, on their part, must respect the principles of collegiality and subsidiarity when it comes to decision-making and exercise of power. In the case of the Church of South India, we demand the institution of a kind of ombudsman to monitor corruption free elections to higher ecclesiastical posts.
20. While appreciating the democratic rules and regulations present in the selection process of leaders among the Catholic religious congregations, we are saddened to find favouritism, casteist interests, and other vested interests playing a role in the selection process. We demand that the religious congregations make active efforts to free themselves from such casteist and sectarian interests.
21. Make financial transactions transparent, and publicly accountable. Credibility of the leaders depends to a very large extent upon their transparency in financial matters. Therefore, while appreciating those leaders who have exemplary records of financial accountability, we demand from every leader the creation of financial structures which have checks-and-balances in-built into them: Create financial councils in every parish /

pastorate / church; adopt policies and measures to share the income and expenditure with the faithful; make the lay-experts to don the mantle of financial administrators; institute periodical internal auditing, and share the reports of auditing with the people.

22. Open the churches for the participation of women in all levels of ministerial leadership. Train them in pastoral, administrative, and theological abilities, and cultivate leadership qualities in them. Recognize the already existing women leaders, and entrust them with important responsibilities of the church.
23. We demand that the pastoral and administrative structures of the churches be radically de-clericalised. Empower the lay people to assume vital roles in spiritual, pastoral, theological, financial, and administrative matters. Educate the people in theological matters, and form good theologians from among them. Be transparent in selecting candidates for ministerial formation, and students for diocesan professional institutions. Follow a consultative process in posting of clergy in various parishes and institutions.
24. Elect ecclesiastical leaders from Dalits and Tribals / Adivasis, who constitute 60% and 20% respectively of Indian Christian population. It is not merely a matter of giving proportionate representation, but that of doing justice to a people who have been systemically denied of opportunities for leadership. It is in cultivating a good leadership among them that the future Church in India is going to develop efficient and enlightened leadership for itself.

Why the Church Needs a Dalit Cardinal?

A Short Note of Appeal

Felix Wilfred

It is good for the Church as a whole to have a Dalit Cardinal. Here are a people who are perhaps one of the most oppressed and marginalized in the world. They are over 250 million – half of the whole of European Union - and form the majority of Christians in this country. Solidarity of the Church with the excluded which Pope Francis makes us realize by his words and gestures will find its crown if he elevates one among the poorest of the poor groups to the dignity of the cardinalate. It will be a great witness to the Gospel and a clear sign that the Church translates into action what it preaches in word about the poor and the suffering. Moreover, the image of the Church as universal, inclusive and compassionate to the last and the least will come out most clearly and distinctly.

Elevation of a Dalit to the rank of Cardinal will be a positive recognition and affirmation of this community who form the majority of Christians in our country. We all witnessed what the elevation of Cardinal Telesphore P. Toppo from among the tribal people meant for them, and the sterling leadership he has given not only to the tribal people but for the whole country as president of CBCI and CCBI. Given the opportunity, a leader of that rank from the Dalits will bring in renewal of the Church in India and open up new paths to the Gospel.

At a time when the Dalits are fighting against the discrimination they suffer from the state, as they are denied the same rights as Hindu Dalits, creation of a cardinal from among them will strengthen the cause and send out a clear message to the civil authorities. If a Dalit cardinal is created, the Church will have a strong moral ground to ask for the rights

of the Dalits with the state. It can proudly and justifiably claim the rights for the Dalits because it has done justice to the cause of the Dalits. Moreover, the creation of a cardinal will bring to the consciousness of the entire Christian community the issue of the Dalits and help it overcome the spirit of casteism.

The Church has created cardinals on the basis of ritual identity – with a cardinal each for the Syro-Malabar Church, and more recently for the Syro-Malankara Church, about which we are happy. At the same time a unique social identity stigmatized as “untouchables” throughout the millennial history needs to be taken into account, which will also show that the universal church is aware of the deeper and complex issues of the Indian society and of the Indian Church. The Indian Constitution has positive provisions meant to overcome the disabilities attached to this identity. There are no such provisions in the Church. Creation of a Dalit cardinal will show to the society and to the world how the Church follows the spirit in which special provisions are made for the weaker and oppressed sections. On the other hand, this is not new to the Church. The neglect and discrimination the Hellenists suffered in the early Church, led the apostles to solve the problem by selecting deacons from among them who understood the discriminated group and ministered to them (Acts. 6: 1 -6).¹ As a result of this provision, “the word of God increased; and the members of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (Acts. 6:7). With the Dalits today we are in a similar situation calling for a leader of high rank from among them.

Finally, we note how strongly the ritual concerns are represented at the level of the central government of the Church, and rightly so. However, the Church in India needs a spokesperson from among the Dalits at the level of Cardinal to be able to bring to the Pope who wishes to be in touch with ground-realities, and to the entire Church, including its central administration, the voice and concerns of the Dalit people. Unfortunately, the influence of caste in the Church and among its leaders, the overwhelming majority of whom are from the middle and upper castes, has not permitted an adequate representation of the issue of Dalit Christians. Appealing for a Cardinal from among the Dalits is not to

foment caste. On the contrary, it will be an important means to abolish caste, since the Dalit people are the ones in the country who have fought most against this system, since they know from bitter experiences the evils of the caste-system. In short, creation of a cardinal by the Church will be perhaps the greatest contribution at the moment it can make to abolish caste in India, something four hundred years of missionary work did not succeed. If this happens – which we hope it will – Pope Francis will go down in history as a unique champion of the cause of the “untouchables” of India.

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